Boston University Graduate School

ANGIE

by

Rita Miller

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, 1949.

1949
AM
mi

BOSTON UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL

Thesis (Novel)

ANGIE

by

Rita Miller

(A.B., Brooklyn College, 1947)

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

1949.

1949
AM
mi
cop 1

APPROVED BY

First Reader Gerald Warner Brace
Gerald Warner Brace, Professor of English

Second Reader E. C. Wagenknecht
Edward Charles Wagenknecht, Professor of English

When? Once upon a time, yesterday, tomorrow, today. Where? The city, many-peopled, in a country called the United States. Why? Because nature's law says someone young will eventually grow old. There is another law, maybe not a law, that says inbetween the being young and growing old, many things happen, all kinds of things--wondering and wishing, knowing and wanting to know more, falling and standing up, meeting and getting to know better. Also, without searching too hard for it, there is dreaming and waking up.

Morning happened to a seventeen-year-old named Angie. The tenement in which she lived was cold. When she woke up, she leaped up and lunged for the bathtub. The same disappointment came every morning. No shower. No hot water. There was nothing but Angie's personal gymnastics for the creation of warmth. With the energy of one fully intent on developing both heat and muscles, heat because it was late spring, and once in a while a cold wind blew, she jumped, twisted, bent, stretched, did contortions on a theme by Nijinsky without ever having heard his name, without knowing the location of the gastrocnemius muscle or any other muscle for that matter, even without knowing all the contents of the Charles Atlas handbook. Angie had decided, one month before this very ordinary morning, that "dynamic tension"meant something about irresistible forces and immovable objects. Because it had sounded like physics, the handbook had been abandoned immediately.

Angie wanted to have a strong body. She yearned and strove for it. Up until she was almost thirteen, she had been involved in weekly alley fights, pitting herself against all comers, male and

1.

female alike. Hers was a peculiar rebirth of the Feminist Movement. Hers was a crudely, if directly articulated drive for equality. However, in the last few years, alley fights had not appealed to her. She did not know why, exactly, but she was quite certain they were no longer desirable.

Shortly after her father had died--Angie was thirteen when Joe Tartrina died--she had abandoned alley fights. She had come to feel that such combats were childish. Her mother had taken a job as stitcher at the local Blakeston Mills, and Angie had been given the responsibility of washing and mending her own clothes. It had made her feel suddenly adult. She forsook wrestling matches and indulged herself only in morning exercises.

Angie reported for breakfast. That is, she went into the kitchen, opened the window, and removed a bottle of milk from the tin box on the ledge. She poured some of it into a glass and drank it standing.

Mamma Tartrina did not approve. She looked at her daughter and spread her heavy arms in a wide gesture of pleading. "Angelina mia," she said, "how many times I tell you no eat that way! Please, please sit down at table and eat like lady. My Giusep--my Joe he may be dead but that no reason for us to to eat like wild people. Anyway, why you take so much time to get here? Exercises again? How many times I tell you to stop the exercises! Exercise! More exercise! A girl no good totear herself to pieces like that. She need body be soft, dolce, not hard like a man. Bones you want! Muscles you want! You want maybe I should give you rag so you polish your bones? Better you let the flesh come. Better you even get fat. Why you no be like other girls? They someday go to movies with boys like Tony Collini.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2016

https://archive.org/details/angie00mill

You go in alley with him and have fight. You break his glasses!"

"But, Mamma, I told you a million times that Tony doesn't need his glasses. The school doctor said his eyes are almost 20/20. They're as good as mine. Maybe he needed the glasses when he was younger, but he doesn't need them now. Maybe he thinks he looks smart with them on. Besides, I don't fight in alleys anymore. I told you a million times!"

Mamma did not hear the last two sentences. She had been bustling about the apartment, and now she returned, holding a crumpled piece of paper. It had spent the night under Angie's pillow. Mamma found it when she made the bed. The poem on the paper began, "To the marriage of true minds, let me not admit impediments."

Angie reached for the paper. "Give me that, Mamma, it's mine! Tony gave it to me. Why haven't I any privacy in this house? Can't I put anything down without you finding it and asking me a million questions about it? What do you want me to do, go out and buy a safe with a lock on it? Gimme the paper!"

"Angelina mia, you no feel well? You read crazy writing? Why you think minds get married? Minds no get married. People get married. I ashamed of myself because I not smart, because I no tell you about life in English words. But now I see I make big mistake. Here you are, seventeen years old and you no know about life yet."

"But Mamma, I know about that! This is different. It's a poem."

"My child, whatever she is, this I tell you: 'To the marriage of true minds!' Chè cosa! Minds no get married. People get married, like your Pappa and me. You read crazy things."

"Yeh, Mamma, I know. Now can I please have that paper? I have

to go to school!" Angie retrieved the paper and gathered together her books, most of which were under the bed. She slipped a skate strap around the books, papers, and handbag, and started for the door.

"Comb you hair!"

Angie searched for her comb, found it in her history book where it had been serving as a place-mark. She combed her hair roughly and rapidly, giving the snarls no kindness. Then she bent down to pick up the rabbit's foot that had fallen from the coat pocket. She cleaned her nails with a pair of scissors. All settled, and she was ready to leave.

Mamma stopped her: "Angie Tartrina. Angelina Concetta Maria Tartrina! You no get away! You no go without eating the break-the-fast! You want the bones to break? You only human. You no can go on forever like this, like mad woman, like imbecille. You drink the orange juice, you hear me?"

"Listen Mom, I haven't time, and besides I don't want any orange juice. I'll drink it when I come home. What do you want--that I should be late?" For the third time, she started for the door. "And listen," she added. "I'm not coming home right after school today. I'll probably get home when you do. I have to go someplace, to the library, for school."

"But you come home for supper, yes? And please, you no go read crazy things like minds getting married. Here is nickel. Do me favor--you take it and buy new comb after school. The one you using got less teeth than I got. Anyway, why you no do homework here in house? We got books. You got school books, at least. Other girls no go library for homework. Why you not like other girls? Why you no..."

Angie finally made the door. "G'bye!" she shouted behind her, racing down the stairs.

Mamma Tartrina waddled into the kitchen, shaking her head sadly, slowly. "Minds getting married! Non c'è vero!"

...

The library provided Angie with a copy of Shakespeare's sonnets. She read doggedly through the procreation series and came at last to the poem she sought. She read it tenderly, reread it and thought gently of Tony for the first time in many months. She wondered if she should apologize for having broken his glasses. Not that she had intentionally done it, nor had she broken them in an alley as Mamma believed, but should she apologize? It had been an accident, really. While walking home from school last Monday, Angie had asked Tony if she could try on his glasses. She had dropped them, and when Tony had berated her, timidly, she had lashed back, "Aw, you don't need them anyway! You just got into a bad habit." Tony had reddened. "It isn't a habit," he had protested. "I need my glasses."

Tony had been silent all the way home. But once they arrived at Angie's door, he had softened. "Here," he said. "This is a poem I copied for you. I think you'll like it." Angie did like it. Now she wanted to read more.

At six-thirty, a librarian approached her and whispered, "We are closing now. Get your books checked and go home."

Suddenly grown obedient, Angie obeyed, and checked out with a Complete Shakespeare. Twilight filled the streets, the light was bad

for reading, but Angie continued to read, with auto horns blowing and annoyed pedestrians complaining about the girl with the swinging shoulders who was walking blindly on, head, heart and eyes submerged in a book. Even the oncoming night seemed to shriek out in imitation of Mamma Tartrina. "Imbecille, better you go home!"

Pausing while a traffic light blinked red, Angie turned around to look back at the library. She watched a librarian close the door, turn the key, and rush off hurriedly, looking at her wristwatch. Angie wished the librarian wasn't in such a hurry. She might have been able to talk to her about Shakespeare. Now, as it had many times before, the question came to Angie: did librarians read when they went home to relax? Did they love books more because they spent their days with them, or less because they had seen too much of them? Silly question. But it would have been pleasant to talk about Shakespeare.

Oh well, thought Angie, I'll talk to Tony about it.

2.

Tony Collini, Jr. was a local aristocrat. His father owned the very successful Crescent Haberdashery, which in addition to accounting for the comfortable financial status of the family, explained Tony's wardrobe. Tony wore suits to school, suits purchased with regard to fit, not price. Most of the other high school boys, and some of the college boys too, wore sweaters over their shirts, not jackets. Tony owned two dozen oxford shirts and wore them with non-gaudy ties. Except for his suits and shoes, he was attired, down to the pigskin wallet in his pocket, in stock from the shelves and window-cases of the Crescent Haberdashery.

Tony was more than superficial splendor; he was also a local "brain." He blamed it all on the set of encyclopedias that had been in his home for all the years he could remember. It was a funny story, he thought--the way Pop had bought the books. Fifteen years before, the front doorbell had rung. Collini, Sr. had opened the door to see a dapper salesman who had immediately released an ack-ack of rapid-fire sales talk. Collini, Sr. had listened without hearing most of the barrage. Only one sentence had struck his ears. "If you're a prosperous man," the salesman had said, "you owe it to your family to take my advice and give them this set of books."

"Yes, I'll take the books." Inside Collini, Sr.'s head was a stream running, Yes, sure I'll buy. Now Maria cannot say she married a dumb Siciliano. Now Maria will know she was lucky when she didn't marry Angelo--North Italy Angelo! All my life I have to listen to her say I come from Sicily. All my years she tells me the sons of Angelo will grow up to go to college. And my children? What of them?

Should they not grow up to go to college too? No?--Because their father is not a man of Italy of the North? My Tony will go to college. He will grow up with these books around him. He will read them--I will make him read them. And Margaret--when she grows up, maybe she too will go to school. In America, girls go to school too. Even the daughters of a "dumb Siciliano"!

The books were bought. Young Tony some years later cut his teeth on The Wonderland of Knowledge. His father did not have to force him to read. Margaret, Tony's younger and only sister, seemed not to care that the books were in the house. Eventually the thick, illustrated volumes became Tony's exclusive property. He read them freely, learning early to "look up" anything that he didn't know. His teachers, when he was placed in school, were amazed and pleased at his precocity. They floated an ideal-studded halo above his head. They pushed him as hard and as fast as he would allow himself to be pushed--and Tony was not an immovable object. He became their little wunderkind, their wager for the future. All was not lost if a dilapidated neighborhood could produce one fact-hoarding Tony. He was the teacher's young man of the future. Future in what? No one, least of all Tony, knew. However, no one doubted that he would be a successful man.

This evening, Tony's intellect was not on his mind. He even forgot, temporarily, the three scholarships that had been offered him, homage fashion, unrolled, scroll-like before his feet. He was thinking about Monday night, graduation night for three hundred students of the Hiram Crain High School, three hundred including himself, his friend Jonah Groten, and Angie. He wondered if Angie still intended to accept his invitation to the graduation party at Jonah's house.

She was unpredictable. He would go over and ask her again, he decided. She was probably finished with supper now, he reasoned. Besides, she usually didn't practice the piano on Friday nights. It would be safe to visit her.

He found Angie in an alley halfway between his house and hers. Or rather, she found him.

"Is that you, Tony?"

"Uh huh. What are you doing in there?"

"Come on in. There's a sick bird here. Maybe it's dead."

He joined her. "It is dead, Angie. I'm very sorry--"

"Well, it's no fault of yours. By the way, Tony--"

"What?"

"I'm sorry about breaking your glasses."

"Forget it. What do you want to do about the bird?"

Angie gave him a hard stare. "We'll bury it, of course."

"All right, I'll help you."

He picked up the bird and wrapped it in his handkerchief. His father would have made him use paper tissues forever had he been able to see the uses Tony made of his hand-rolled handkerchiefs. Tony, however, knew an emergency when he saw one, and this was an emergency.

"Tony--"

"What, Angie?"

"How are we going to bury the bird? I haven't got a box."

"I'll get one from the store. Meet me at your house in twenty minutes. Here, you take the bird with you."

"O.K."

They left in opposite directions. Fifteen minutes later, Tony

ran into the Tartrina apartment with an empty stud-box in his hand. "Will this do?" he asked. Angie smiled in answer. "Come on, let's go back to the alley. We can bury it there."

Mamma Tartrina stared at the two of them. They were both crazy. Of that she was certain. Worse still, she suspected that Angie had made Tony crazy, because after all, Tony was always a good, sensible boy. "Pazzo, pazzo!" she said aloud, after the two had left. "All bad things happen to me. I have daughter who breaks boys' glasses and buries birds. Why she like that? Pazzo! Crazy, crazy!"

...

Two lean, good-looking young people bent low over a foot-square plot of earth. Angie seemed confused. "Do you think we ought to say something over it?" she asked her fellow grave-digger.

"The Twenty-Third Psalm, maybe?"

"All right. You say it."

"No. I'd feel silly. You say it."

"It doesn't make any difference. No one can hear us anyway."

"Let's say it together."

"All right."

They said it solemnly. "The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall not want..." When they finished, they placed a stone over the freshly-rearranged earth, took a final glance at their handiwork, and left the alley.

"Angie, want a coke?"

"All right, if I can pay for my own."

He blushed. "Why can't you let me feel we have a date? Oh, that

reminds me. I almost forgot to ask you, what with the burial and all--are we going to the graduation party together?"

"I suppose so."

Tony was pleased. "I'll meet you in front of the candy-store across the street from the school. If we tried meeting at one of the school exits, we'd probably get stampeded. There'll be an awfully big crowd."

"All right. Say--Monday night is the night Mr. Lawton works late. I bet he'll see me in my cap and gown, if he looks out of his window, that is."

"Who's Mr. Lawton?"

Angie explained. "He's that handsome man who works for the--I forgot the name of the company--it's that big building near the school."

Tony still did not understand. "Do you know him, Angie?"

"Well,no, not exactly--but I've seen him a lot of times. He's very distinguished-looking."

"Oh."

They drank their cokes and walked off, Angie chewing her straw. "Tony," she asked meditatively, "what are you going to do this summer?"

"Nothing much--a little reading and such. I'll help Pop in the store when he wants me to. Besides, I have to do some thinking this summer about what I'm going to major in in college. What about you?"

"I don't know. I wanted to get a job until college begins, not that I'm sure I'm going. Mamma said no about the job. She said that I'm going to work next summer, so I might as well rest this summer.

According to Mamma, after this, I'll spend the rest of my life working."

"What about the piano?"

"I'll practice even when it gets hot. I probably won't have much time to practice when school begins again, so I might as well get in all I can now. You know something, Tony?"

"What?"

"I don't understand Mamma sometimes. I don't see why she doesn't want me to work this summer. I could save up some money and maybe make things easier in the winter. But she insists on my not working until the summer is over."

They reached Angie's house. "Well," Tony said, "I think your mother is right. It won't hurt you to rest a few months."

"Rest from what? I still don't understand it."

"Don't worry about it. Your mother knows what she's doing."

"Yeh."

"Wonder what time it is. My watch stopped. Must be late."

"Yeh. You go home, Tony. See you Monday."

"G'night, Angie."

"So long."

He walked home, whistling. It had turned out to be a pleasant evening, despite its macabre beginning. That Angie! She wasn't tough after all; she was all tenderness with the bird. He wished she would be all tenderness with him, too, but perhaps there was something about him that Angie didn't like. He didn't know. He just took her as she was, including her haphazard treatment of him. Things might change, someday, maybe--but he couldn't say. Angie was <u>so</u> unpredictable. Why, he wondered, was <u>he</u> so stable, or should he say consistent, himself?

He had loved her all the years he had known her--tomboy, woman someday, if he knew her that long. Meanwhile, who was this Lawton she was talking about? Tony wondered if he should worry about it, thought a moment, and concluded that Lawton was most likely some crusty businessman. At any rate, it was too late to worry tonight. He would go home and get a good night's sleep.

And who was this Mr. Lawton whome Angie had been admiring silently, from a distance, of course, for three full months? Mr. Lawton was a super-salesman, the same super-salesman, as a matter of coincidental fact, who had sold Anthony Collini, Sr. the set of encyclopedias. Mr. Lawton did not remember the sale, nor would have Mr. Collini recognized him if their paths were to cross. But this was not important to Al Lawton. Nothing was important, currently, except his impending promotion to the rank of Assistant Vice President of the Caswell Hardware Company.

Fifteen years had passed since the sale of the encyclopedias. Fifteen years had passed, carrying Al Lawton through the depression (those were his super-salesman years, futile and unprofitable as they had been), carrying him through the beginning, duration and end of World War II (Al had been deferred because of a punctured ear-drum), and finally, depositing him as 2nd Assistant Vice President of what he familiarly called the "Cas-co."

Al Lawton had lived forty years, and had spent at least the last eighteen of these forty on the thin, glossy surface of businessmen-elite society. Blessed with an almost Dorian Grey type of youthfulness, he remained the tall, slender young man he appeared destined to be always. Grey hair? A few streaks, set dramatically in the most conventionally advantageous place, at his temples. Slightly lacking in energy? Perhaps--but the lack manifested itself in an attractive way. His young hustler quality had calmed, smoothing itself to a quiet but firm aggressiveness. His position as 2nd Assistant Vice President fitted him well, for it called upon him to manage the

office, among other things. He managed superbly; he was the autocrat of the desks.

Despite his title, he was somewhat ashamed of his job. It fell short of his self-set goal. He had hoped to own and manage his own business by the time he was forty, and although he was running someone else's business, he could never forget that he did not own it.

"Where's your office, Al?" a friend would ask. Lawton would smile cynically. "It's in a sloppy part of the city. I don't know too much about the section. All the walking I do around here is to and from my car, and to and from lunch."

To and from the car, but never slowly enough to see Angie stop and stare at him, her new-found idol. What would he have thought if he knew that Angie, in pure, unlimited hero-worship, had memorized the license number of his car?

No matter. Today, Monday, Lawton was deep in work. He had to finish by six o'clock if he expected to go home, have dinner, change his clothes and return to this very same "sloppy part of the city" by 9:00 o'clock. His employer's newest and therefore most desirable customer was giving a housewarming party. Why a businessman should bother to buy and renovate a house in such a neighborhood was beyond Lawton's understanding. Nevertheless, he had to go to the party.

...

A few hours later, across the street from Lawton's office, in the auditorium of the Hiram Crain High School, Angie, Tony and their friend Jonah sat, with some three hundred others, listening to the chief speaker of their graduation program.

The speaker, babbitty and beaming, was talking down both to the cap and gowned mass in front of him and to the bursting-with-pride crowd of mothers and fathers. He sought to sprinkle his speech with anecdotes, and this he was doing successfully, for did not all his jokes cause everyone to burst into hysterical laughter?

"And I should like to tell you now that you must maintain your ideals solidly and visibly before your eyes, your soul, your GRASP! Ideals should never--must never degenerate into the abyss of abstraction. Do not profess if you do not truly believe. Do not be like the man who claimed he loved children. One day, the sidewalk in front of his house was being re-paved. Suddenly, one of the workers rushed into the man's house, shouting, 'There are two kids who stepped into the cement and I can't get them out!' The man went into the street with the worker, and sure enough, there were two children imprisoned ankle-high in the unhardened cement. He shouted at them, saying he would call the police and have them arrested.

"Do not be like this man. He liked children--in the abstract--but--not--in--the--concrete!"

Mad, mad room-rocking laughter. The speaker continued. "Ideals are the--"

Angie gave up trying to listen, and dimmed her eyes. Tony, across the aisle, looked at her out of the corner of his left eye. She looked pretty that way, he thought, with a daydream on her face. He wished he could compose a poem, perhaps call it "Angie at Graduation," and give it to her.

He thought about it; he composed:

> The haze of daydreaming covered her face,
> Where the eagerness should have played.
> The speaker spoke, spoke droningly on,
> Not knowing his words were an endless parade--

Well? He was stuck. Besides, it was hard to compose in his head. He could use pencil and paper--but that was impossible. He had no paper with him, and anyway, it was graduation. He would just have to write it in his head.

> The haze of daydreaming misted her eyes,
> While the lights--

Could one use mist as a verb? He would say moistened. Her eyes did seem sort of wet, but it was more likely because of the lights than daydreaming. The hell with it. H e'd write it when he got home.

The music teacher walked to the center of the platform. "As you know," she began, "we have many talented young people here at Hiram Crain. We are sorry to say that tonight we are losing one of our finest musicians, Miss Angelina Tartrina. And now, Miss Tartrina will play her last piece under the friendly ceiling of her high school, our own Hiram Crain." She sat down, folding her hands.

Angie arose, clammy of hand, and made the long, self-conscious march down the aisle, looking neither to left nor right. When she reached the piano, she dat down quickly and stared at the keys as if they were the only friends she had in the entire room.

"Announce your piece!" whispered the music teacher in an officious hiss.

Angie turned and faced the audience. "Thmoolight snata," she mumbled. Only those in the first two rows heard her. The music teacher came to her rescue. She stood up, smiled with tight, stiff lips, and

finally parted them, measuredly, to say, "Ladies and gentlemen, Miss Tartrina has chosen to play for us 'The Moonlight Sonata' by Ludwig Van Beethoven."

Angie corrected her. "I'm only going to play the adagio from the sonata."

The music teacher sat down, folding her hands. Applause, then silence.

It was a sticky night, and Angie was fully aware of it. Also, she was annoyed by stockings (one size too big) and pinned-in hair. Her hands were the greatest bother of all. They were perspiring heavily. Angie was sure that if she merely touched her fingers to the damp keys, the fingers would slide right off. She stared dumbly at the keys, wondering how to compete with their slipperiness. The moment was heavy and long, despite the patience of the audience. The moment threw its weight on her, combining itself with the oppressiveness of the damp night. "Excuse me," she announced to the audience. "I have to get a towel."

The audience's laughter was kind. "Why she no use her handkerchief?" Mrs. Tartrina inquired of her neighbor, who merely shrugged her shoulders in answer.

Angie stalked the length of the platform and disappeared through a door at stage left. Ah, sanctuary! She was in the Green Room, sacred locker-room of the orchestra members. There was a towel on a rack beside the desk. It belonged to the music teacher, no doubt, but no matter. Angie yanked it off and returned to the piano. Applause. Silence.

She faced her audience, and grinned. "I'll be ready in a minute," she said, confidently. No one questioned her. She wiped vigorously, first her hands, finger after damp finger, and then the keyboard. Finished, she crumpled the towel and put it on the piano bench alongside of her.

The music teacher arose again. "Miss Tartrina will now play 'The Moonlight Sonata' by Ludwig Van Beethoven."

She played well. Her notes rolled out leisurely, rising to their peak and falling to a forced and hopeless relaxation. The effects were good; the lights were soft; the dampness and discomfort were forgotten. The applause of the audience compensated for everything, including perspiration and interruption. When the handclapping noise subsided, Angie nodded her head once in acknowledgment, as she had been taught to do, and rushed back to her seat in untaught haste.

The music teacher unfolded her hands and smiled beneficently. Tony, his poem forgotten, was very proud, but no prouder than Mrs. Tartrina whose mouth was an ear-to-ear crescent, whose hands ached to join in the applause but could not for Angie had forbidden it. (It's not polite, Mamma. If I'm good, you can smile, but you can't clap. Not polite.")

The ceremony was almost over. When the diplomas were given out, they were found to be blanks, rolled perfectly and tied with shiny white ribbon. The real ones were to be called for the following week. No one understood why, but no one cared, especially Tony who was anxious for the program to end and his date to begin.

The twenty-two piece orchestra played the recessional, and all was

over. Then, the room was flooded with perfunctory kisses, gruff paternal handshakes, and happy slaps on the back. Dewey-eyed parents beamed at their young as if each individual cap-and-gown wearer was a hero returned from Troy. Pride, reminiscence, friendship, sentimentality--all waved through the crowded auditorium until finally, the doors opened, and the streets received the tide.

Mrs. Tartrina and Angie met Tony and his parents at the candy-store.

"You two going to Jonah's party?" inquired Collini, Sr.

"Yes, Pop. Come on Angie, we'll be late."

Mrs. Tartrina said, "I wish we have party at our house. Then, we can be all together." Angie was gracious. "We'll have a party some other time, soon, Mamma."

The group broke up with another round of congratulations and I'm proud of you, very proud, I'm proud of you, so very proud repeated as a chant. Angie and Tony left for the party.

...

Meanwhile, Lawton at his party was becoming ill, rapidly. How was he to have known it would be so dull? He only drank when parties were unbearable, and his intoxication threshold was high. Besides, his boss hadn't arrived, so there was no one to censure him. He had been drinking from eight to eleven, and at eleven, he had only enough prescence of mind to leave the party. He would not make a fool of himself in front of friends, much less strangers, much less business contacts. So far, no one knew he was drunk. He kept out of conversations and only smiled when he was addressed. He crawled into his car and drove automatically back to the office. He wondered vaguely why it was so dark, but he did not let it trouble him. He parked, and fell flat on

on the car's front seat. He would sleep a little while. It was still early. No one would know the difference.

The seat rose slowly, spirally in the general direction of the car's roof. The seats gymnastics would not have annoyed him ordinarily, but he had a dim suspicion, nothing definite, mind you, that he was on it. In feeble imitation of an amusement park ride, his damp body was revolving to the tune of an off-key, heard-long-ago Danse Macabre. His tongue occupied an abnormal amount of space. He salivated excessively.

His scalp, when he could remember where it was, itched tormentingly, but he lacked the energy to lift a woozy hand to scratch it. His closed eyes saw linoleum store patterns which were intricately drawn, but colorless. Now, nothing seemed more important than that one of those boxes, any one, should cease shifting long enough to enable him to count the squares. They absolutely refused to be counted. Lawton tried to make the boxes stand still, but every time he squinted his eyes, the boxes rearranged themselves.

Of course, he wasn't completely certain that he remembered how to count. He wondered if he, master of the office's business machines and mahut of the girls who operated them, might have to resort to counting on his fingers. Could he find his fingers? They seemed to be crawling on the floor. If only the linoleum blocks would stop moving, he could bend down and pick up his fingers. It would be very good to have his fingers. He could count the blocks, and he could scratch his scalp. What was the use of this exhausting speculation! Neither arm would reveal itself, much less lift or break itself into divisions. No elbow, wrist, palm. No fingers.

His saliva overflowed, and a few drops slid out of the corner of his mouth. Amid the noise of swirling car and body, he heard the drops drone through space until they plopped on the faraway floor. Let them drop. Lawton did not care; he was busy concentrating on something else. He was certain that if he could ignore all distracting sounds, long enough at least to count the shifting blocks of linoleum, he might, eventually, if he were most careful, determine if he were too drunk to drive home. Soon, mercifully, the swirling and spiralling ceased, and Lawton slept.

At a little after one o'clock, Angie and Tony, walking home from Jonah's graduation party, passed Lawton's car. Angie stopped abruptly, yanking loose the hand Tony had managed to acquire some three minutes before. She peered into the car. Lawton was asleep.

Tony did not understand. "What are you stopping here for?

"But it's Mr. Lawton!"

"But he's asleep. Looks drunk to me."

"Mr. Lawton is not a drunkard!"

"How do you know?"

"He's tired; that's why he's asleep. Maybe he worked late. Poor man, he looks exhausted!"

"Come on, let's go home."

Lawton woke up, squinted at them. "Hi kids, wanna buy some books?"

"Huh?" said Tony.

"What's the matter, Mr. Lawton?" asked Angie, anxiously.

Lawton peered at her. "And who're you?"

Angie did not know exactly. That is, she didn't know who she was in relation to Mr. Lawton. What could she say--that she was a silent admirer?

Corny. After all, he did not know her at all. Neither did she know him--if introductions were necessary in order to know people.

"Can I help you, sir?" offered Tony, politely. Angie scowled at the "sir"--it sounded ancient.

"Nuh," mumbled Lawton, "go file a letter. Answer the phone." He closed his eyes, and there they were--the linoleum blocks again, in color this time, black, greyish-black, grey, white, red--restless, shifting red, redder, reddest--

"Come on, Angie, let's go home."

"But we can't leave him here in that condition!"

"I thought you said he doesn't drink."

"It was a special occasion. It must have been. Mr. Lawton is a grown man, and if he chooses to drink once in a while, he knows what he's doing. He isn't seventeen years old, you know."

"Come on, Angie, please let's go."

"No, we can't. Wait, I'll think of something."

Tony sighed, and said nothing while Angie thought slowly about how if Mr. Lawton was drunk, he was an adult and he had a right to be, and maybe he was lonely and unhappy and had to drink once in a while, and if Tony did it, it would be wrong, but if Mr. Lawton did it, it was all right, all of it, but maybe it wasn't all right, because after all, Mr. Lawton had to work the next day and if he didn't feel well in the morning, he might not be able to go to work, and besides, he looked helpless, and besides some more, she liked the way he looked helpless, and besides--

"Tony, let's take him somewhere, home or something. We can't leave him here like this. It might rain or something."

Tony was losing patience. "But Angie, listen to reason! If it rains, he's safe, perfectly safe. It's a covered car. Let him sleep it off. Does he work in the building here?"

"Yes."

"Well, when he wakes up, he can go straight in to work. Let's go home."

"No!"

"Why?"

"He just can't sleep in a car all night and go to work in the morning! He'll feel terrible!"

"So what are we going to do about it?"

"Like I said, let's take him home--to his house. I'll get his address from his wallet."

Angie nudged her hero, reaching in through the window. Lawton stirred, smiling at her wanly. "Hi kid," he said. "Get me that letter yet?"

"Mr. Lawton..."

"Hmmm?"

"May I have your wallet, please? Only for a minute."

He looked for it, slapping his pockets and chest, finally throwing up his hands, weakly. "It's stolen!" he said. Angie saw something with a dull shine on the floor. "There's your wallet, Mr. Lawton, on the floor there." Lawton obligingly reached down and picked it up. "Here," he mumbled, "this what you want?"

Angie took it from his hand. Their fingers touched. It was a beautiful moment. "Have you a fever, Mr. Lawton?" she asked, timidly putting her hand to his forehead.

"Nuh. Take the wallet and go home. Buy yourself a malted." He closed his eyes. "Thanks for bringing me here."

Tony retrieved Angie's hand and quickly lost it again. "Let's go home," he said, sounding like a weak chorus. Angie shook her head at him, vigorously, impatiently. "Don't bother me, Tony. I have to find his address."

It took a long time for Angie to find the address. First, she had to look at the picture in his wallet. It was of a woman, a dark, smiling woman wearing a lot of lipstick, and a bored expression.

"All right, Tony, here's the address."

Tony shook his head. "And what are we supposed to do with it?" he asked. He wished he could be masterful, put Angie in the car, climb behind the wheel and drive Lawton home, all in a flourish. Not that he cared what happened to Lawton, but he knew it would make Angie happy, perhaps even proud of him. He could not drive. He would take lessons as soon as possible. This must not happen again.

It was very late, and Angie was beginning to realize it. If action were to be taken, it must be taken immediately. There seemed to be no way of getting Lawton home by car. So then, he must be taken home by subway. He would have to be dragged, literally, but he must be taken home. Tony could not be right; Mr. Lawton could not, must not spend the night in the car as if he were some--<u>hobo!</u> He was a man with a home, and he should be in it, and Angie would see to it.

She climbed into the car, and joy of joys, she had Lawton's head in her lap. "Mr. Lawton," she cooed, tenderly, "we're going to take you home on the train. Please try to get up. We'll help you."

Tony was frantic. "Angie, get out of that car! I know all girls want to be nurses, but you! Angie, please--you're not the type! What are you doing with his head in your lap? You don't even know him!"

"He's a man in trouble."

"We'll both be in trouble if we don't go home."

"Stop wasting time, Tony. If you don't help me get him home, I'll have to do it myself, but I'll do it."

It was useless. Tony gave up. The two of them pleaded with Lawton, tugged at him, and finally got him out of the car and on his feet. As soon as Tony locked the car, they were on their way.

The trip to Lawton's apartment was long and difficult, and called on all of Angie's loyalty. Lawton sang bawdy lyrics under his breath. The people on the train bent their ears. Most conversation ceased, leaving in its wake frankly curious faces. The car was almost silent, while its passengers concentrated on Lawton's mumbled songs. Then, two hours later, Lawton was on his bed, shouting, "Stay with me, you two. Sleep over. I don't feel well. I feel ter-ri-ble! The boy can sleep in the bathtub."

Angie almost wanted to stay, although she didn't know where she was supposed to sleep if Tony was to sleep "in the bathtub." Now, after all the time it had taken to meet Mr. Lawton, now was no time to lose contact with him. She tried imagining herself, some days hence, approaching Mr. Lawton in the street, saying "You know, I took you home one night. You remember me, of course? My name is Angie Tartrina and I live around here, and I thought you might want to know I took you home." That would not do. She could almost guess Mr. Lawton's reaction. He wouldn't remember her. This whole evening would be entirely wasted; she

would have to get to meet him all over again.

"Tony," let's stay here tonight. He's sick--maybe we shouldn't run out on him." Tony was overwrought. "Oh no we aren't!" he shouted. He almost screeched. "We're going home, NOW!"

It was useless. They argued for another half-hour, anyway.

On the subway, going home, Angie fell asleep on Tony's shoulder. Rage subsided. Tony was at peace.

...

Fear and fury walked the streets. Anger, worry and sleeplessness trudged to the Collini doorbell.

Rrrrrrrrinnnnnnggggg! No answer.

Rrrrrrrrrrinnnnnnnnggggg! Still no answer.

Mrs. Tartrina pounded at the door. Ten more minutes, and Mr. Collini staggered downstairs, tying his green and gold-striped bathrobe around his burly waistline. He glanced with annoyance at his wrist-watch. (He slept with it on.) It was five o'clock in the morning. He opened the door, cautiously.

"Where my Angie is?"

"I don't know. Isn't she home in bed?"

"No. No home. Where my Angie is? Your Tony, he good boy, but where Angie is? All the night I sit. I fall asleep even. No Angie!"

Collini, Sr. had slept a good night, up until his abrupt awakening. Almost a full, good night, that is, for he had awakened momentarily two hours before, sensing that Tony was not home. His tongue had wandered into his cheek, and he had passed a pleasant few minutes

thinking dreamily of the first time he hadn't come home all night. He remembered, remembered well his introduction into humankind's favorite indoor sport. He remembered the grin he had been unable to reslant the morning he had come home after spending the night with one Teresella. His mother had screamed that her son was a bum, bum, adding that he must have been too drunk to find his way home. His father had quieted her, winking at the boy.

And now, his son! Anthony Collini, Jr. His son was a man! Angie? He had assumed that she was home safe in bed while Tony was out testing his manliness. Angie? Not Angie! She was a crazy, wild kid, but a good kid, not wild in a way that counted on a cold night. Where were they, then?

He became at once a neighbor, a friend, a man of responsibility. "Mrs. Tartrina," he said, "come upstairs. Maria must be awake by now. We'll talk--see what we can do."

Maria Collini made coffee. The three of them sat waiting for the phone to ring, for the doorbell to sound, for something to happen while they talked and came to a general conclusion which was not fully accepted by Mamma Tartrina. The kids, suggested Collini, Sr. had been at the party. The party lasted a long time, and afterwards, they had gone out. "Kids always go out and eat some more after a party," Mr. Collini said, "as if they don't gobble enough!" He tried to be cheerful, and his wife agreed to his every word, nodding her head with semi-vigor. Mamma Tartrina, however, was not fully satisfied. Tony was a boy, and Angie a girl. That made things different. In a way, though, it wasn't too different. Tony was a good boy, like Angie was a good girl. But he was a boy...

After awhile, Mamma began to calm down in a peculiar way. She would expect something terrible, not That, not That, of course, but something terrible. Maybe Angie was out burying another bird. Who could know what she was doing? Mamma had lived with her for seventeen years, and she still couldn't predict Angie's actions. Sure, sure, she had tried to bring her up to know right from wrong. It had been a tough job, the good Dio knew, especially without Pappa. Angie had never accepted simple statements. She asked questions. So many questions! Thousands, millions of them! Mamma remembered so many of them, years of them:

"Angelina mia, never tell a lie."

"But Mamma, yesterday you told the conductor I was four years old. I'm gonna be six tomorrow!"

"That was so I no have to pay fare for you."

"Oh, it's all right to lie to save money? Yes, Mamma?"

"NO! Angelina, I never do it again. Forget, yes?"

and years later, when Angie was in elementary school:

"Angelina, you have the tests in school?"

"Yeah."

"Angelina mia, I hope you no cheat on the tests, never!"

"Never."

"Is not honest to take the work of someone else."

"No." Then Angie had wrinkled her face. "Mamma, I have to ask you something."

"What, bambina?"

"Yesterday we took a test in arithmetic, long division, and Jonah didn't know all the answers, and he looked scared. So when the teacher wasn't looking, I gave him my paper to copy from, and he copied all the

answers and gave me back the paper and the teacher never saw a thing."

"Angelina!"

"Was it wrong, Mamma?"

"Si!"

"But Jonah would have failed! He was all mixed up and he was sweating!"

"But you never must take his paper."

"Oh, no! I wouldn't do that because he never knows the right answers anyway!"

It had been very difficult. Angelina and all the questions. So many questions! Now this! Now it was after five o'clock!

There was the sound of a key jiggling at the door. Tony walked in, his eyes half closed, his navy-blue suit rumpled. "Hello," he said. "What are you all up for? Hello, Mrs. Tartrina. Angie's home already. I left her in your hall, ringing the bell. She figured you were asleep, and she forgot to take her key."

They asked him where he had been. He explained in polite detail, and gallantly enough, added that Mr. Lawton was a friend of his, and that Angie had objected to taking him home. All evening, he explained, Angie had complained that it was terribly late and her Mamma would be worried. After awhile, Mamma accepted his story as satisfactory. She went home and helped her drowsy Angie to bed.

The Collinis retired. Collini, Sr. was very disappointed.

4.

The Tartrina-Collini neighborhood was Sunday-tranquil. Church-going done, dinners eaten, baby-carriages pushed from home of mother to home of mother-in-law, youth banded together, heading for "the city", homework being done by others, fathers asleep atop, within and below the newspapers, the symphony imprisoned in a few homes, couples appropriating the living-rooms on the departure of movie-bent families—Sunday-tranquil, the neighborhood knew it was afternoon.

Angie was home trying to practice. The day seemed far from pleasant. Everytime she warmed to the music, Mamma would come into the living-room and ask her to eat something.

"This morning you no eat the break-the-fast, and now no lunch!"

"But Mamma, I'm not hungry!"

"Is important you eat!"

"But I'm practicing!"

"But you lose all you strength if you no eat!"

Angie decided to go and practice in Jonah's house. She left hurriedly, taking only her music. She blinked at the sunlight, walking without taking detours, following a straight-line-is-the-shortest-distance-between-two-points line to the house of Jonah Groten.

Jonah was surprised to see Angie. It was not often that he saw her without Tony. Tony, Jonah and Angie had formed a triumverate years ago in elementary school, a triumverate in the form of a mutual-aid society. Tony and Angie helped Jonah with mental matters, and in turn, Jonah gave them gratitude, affection and unswerving loyalty. When

the three of them were not inseparable, then two of them were together. In twosome, though, they were either both the young men, or Tony and Angie, rarely Jonah and Angie.

This Sunday afternoon, the piano, not Jonah was the attraction. Jonah's brother had left the baby-grand crowding the living-room when he had married and moved to a bohemian part of the city. Jonah was glad to have the piano, although he could not play and did not care to learn. He regarded the piano as a social asset; his parties were the most successful ones in the neighborhood. There was always someone who could play the piano, and sooner or later all his friends gathered around it. The piano was kept in tune, and polished more thoroughly than any other piece of furniture in the Groten house. Angie was welcome to practice on it anytime, she had been told. Preferring the privacy of her own home, she rarely took advantage of the offer.

"Glad you finally found your way here, Tart--you're welcome any time, any time at all, babe."

"Thanks, Jonah. I'll only be here an hour."

"Cut the polite jabber-gabber. Stay as long as you like. I won't bother you, Tart."

She pushed back the piano-lid and went to work, reveling in the glorious, uninterrupted privacy.

"Angie?" Jonah's head was in the doorway.

"What?"

"If I'm good and quiet, can I sit in there and listen? I like music."

How could she refuse him? After all, it was his house, his

piano. She sighed. "Come in, only please don't talk to me."

"Don't worry, Tart--you won't even know I'm here."

"And please stop calling me 'Tart.'"

"Sure enough, babe!"

She played, ignoring her bruised thumb cuticle, the result of a malcontrolled glissando. Three more exercises, ten times each, and she would be finished. If only Jonah wouldn't interrupt her! In a few minutes, Jonah was leaning on the piano. "Play that part again," he said. "It wasn't bad."

"It's only an exercise."

"Oh."

"Tart, I mean Angie--can I get you a cold drink? Something to eat? My ma just knocked off some solid sausage, ground 'em herself."

"No, please."

"How'd it feel when you played at graduation? Didya feel like a celebrity or a big shot? I mean, were you nervous or scared? I sure got a bang out of when you went out and got that towel. Who else would do daffy cuckoo things like that?"

"It wasn't cuckoo. The keys were wet," Angie answered. She remembered Tony's comments on the wet keys and towel incident. He had beamed admiration, had taken her hand, saying, "You seemed heroic, somehow. I was so proud of you." She didn't know which interpretation was less true. She hadn't been heroic, and she certainly hadn't been "cuckoo." Wiping the keys was a simple, necessary operation. She couldn't have played on the wet keys. Why didn't people understand? They were both wrong--Tony and Jonah. They didn't know anything about piano-playing. If you have a lash in your eye, remove it; if your piano is wet, dry it. Very elementary.

"Look, Jonah--you can stand there if you want to, but please don't talk to me. I have to finish this in an hour. I suppose I can't chase you away, though. It's not my house."

"Hey, kiddo--none of that! Forget it's my house. I want you to feel like it's yours anytime you want it, anytime at all. Just make like I'm not here, and don't let me catch you being polite. We're friends, aren't we?"

"Yep."

She finished one exercise, finally, and smiled with relief. Two more to go. She made a bargain with herself. She would play the last two exercises only five times each, and try to finish at home. It seemed to be easier to get rid of Mamma than to make Jonah stop bothering her. After all, it was his house.

"You look awfully warm, Tart. Can I get you that drink? It's cold cider, real good."

"No, Jonah--please."

Two more runs on the exercise, one more, no more. She would have to cut out that glissando or bandage her thumb. It hurt more every time she used it. That was silly--how could she play with a bandaged thumb?

Jonah sat down beside her on the piano bench. "Hey, Tart--that there freckle on your nose--I like it."

"That's nice."

"Do you need it for anyting special? I mean can I borrow it?"

"Jonah, my friend, here--I'll give it to you, if you'll only go away and let me practice a little longer. I'll wrap it up and give it to you, for henceforth and forthwith and for at least a week afterwards. Only go away and let me practice!"

"Y'don't have to yell at me. I was only being funny."

"Ha."

He looked surprisingly contrite as she packed her music and prepared to leave. He pulled her sleeve. "Y'don't have to go. I'll be quiet, honest!"

She reached the door. "Honest, Jonah Groten, you're the punkiest salonier I ever saw. T'hell with you, I'm going home and I should have stayed there in the first place."

"I'm the punkiest what?"

"Salonier. It's a man who has an open-house for musicians and writers and artists."

"Yeh, that's me."

"So long."

He shouted "Hey, wait!" but she was gone.

Tony was sitting on the Groten porch on a battered armchair evicted from the living-room. He jumped up as Angie rushed out. "I knew you were in there," he said. "I heard you playing and I stayed out here because I didn't want to disturb you."

The lovely boy! The wonderful, thoughtful, understanding Tony! Angie smiled at him, creasing the freckle. Tony's image wafted into Angie's head and stood radiant before the cowed image of Jonah Groten. The cowed image looked up, saw the golden intruder, and with thin-voiced shrieking, leapt up and away, running with robes flying into the unlit, low-ceilinged passageways. The golden image, alone, looked around him, breathed deeply, and sat down, cupping head in hands, and grinning up at the top of the dome. The illusion evaporated quickly. Tony and Angie walked home.

5.

Lawton was troubled. His job at the Caswell Company (Cas-co) inspired him to perform at a mere twenty per cent of capacity whereas he had become accustomed to working at a full fifty per cent.

He stood now in front of the washroom mirror, preparing for lunch. His lunch "hour" lasted from two to three hours, fifteen minutes of which he spent combing his hair, adjusting his tie, and washing his hands in preparation for the invariable "important man in the city " with whom he had a lunch appointment. Many important men. Many smooth-talking, affluent, poised and above all successful men. These were his friends. These were the demigods with whom he ate, and with whom he vacationed, when he could afford it. These were the invitees to a "drink at my apartment." These were the Messiahs, the Jupiters, the Merchant Princes.

They liked him. "Al?" they would ask. "He's a good fellow. A smart boy. Invite him to dinner next week, Georgia." Georgia, obedient, would promptly invite him to dinner, and the "smart boy" would appear, precisely five minutes past eight, extremely pleasant and well-tailored. Not too smoothly tailored, however. He had read in a Man-About-Town column in a playbill that the well-dressed man should always have one item of his attire slightly sloppy. Not really sloppy--casual, rather. It made the difference between appearing newly-rich and appearing born to wealth. Lawton considered the advice sound. He retained the blade-sharp trouser creases, the starched shirts, pressed suits, and glistening tie-clasp and studs. He abandoned garters. His socks, however, elastic and long accustomed to hugging his ankles, remained right in place. Lawton was somewhat proud of his adjustment; he

followed the Man-About-Town rule and still retained his neat appearance.

"He's such a good-looking person!" Georgia would say, or Evelyn or Jeannette. The husband, the Merchant Prince would agree. Lawton would be well-received. "Nice to have around. Invite him again, Georgia."

Lawton was a good conversationalist. He would listen intelligently, nod appropriately and smile slightly. He would never laugh unnecessarily, nor would he ever lose face. There were rules. He knew and followed them: Never laugh for more than a transient second; it puts one at a disadvantage, especially if one becomes more exuberant than one's companion. Never talk too much. If one must lecture, one should lecture briefly. The less one reveals, the less for which one can be condemned. Nothing must cost Lawton the friendship of the Merchant Princes.

There were other rules. He told them to himself over and over again. Control your face, Al, my boy. An expressive face is for actors and you are not an actor. You may, if you have to, borrow from the theater and use your face, as necessary, but sparingly, ever sparingly, even stingily. And then remember, Al, light of my life, a poker face is not to be desired either. A completely immobile face is for cardsharps. Temper the calm with the discreetly emotional, and remember this: Feeling calm is not a reason for <u>appearing</u> calm. Turbulence may be expected. It may be effective. So then, be turbulent. And feeling despondent is not an acceptable reason for looking despondent. It may be required of you to appear debonair. So then, oblige.

Remember this, Al my lad, your brains are your stocks-in-trade. Use them, Lawton boy, use them cleverly and deftly. Use your face. Control your face. Know the score. Know your assets.

He knew his assets--the sobriety of the moody Lawton, the social Lawton, the eternal young man in a raglan coat, the understanding Lawton, the challenging Lawton. He was certain that if he abided by the rules, his status would remain undisturbed. He was self-placed on par with "superiors" and miles above those he considered below him. The balance was perfect. Praise be to the world's businessmen, Lawton knew his assets and never once erred in the use of them.

Damn! He shouldn't have shaved last night. Overnight shaves never lasted. Perhaps he could use talc for camouflage. There, that did it.

One final look in the mirror. All right.

Fingernails, Al?

He washed his hands again, and dried them vigorously. He pulled a nailfile out of a goatskin pocket-case, and used it rapidly.

Enough of this. It was 12:15 already and his appointment was for 12:30.

Brush your suit, Al!

Where was his clothes-brush? In his locker? He looked. No, it was in the medicine chest. When had he put it in the medicine chest? That was no place for a clothes-brush.

Brush thoroughly! There, that really did it. He sped away, remembering to close the washroom door softly.

Christ! He needed a shine. Well, then, he would be five minutes late. No calamity.

No. He'd do without the shine. He was on his way.

...

Angie, who was walking past his office building when Lawton emerged, pretended to be surprised.

"Hello, Mr. Lawton."

"Hi, there. Which way are you walking?"

She thought quickly and named an uptown location. "All right," Lawton said. "Hop in and I'll give you a lift."

Nice, nice, very nice! She was riding in a car with Mr. Lawton. But what could she say to him? She couldn't just sit there and look at the scenery. This was the real Mr. Lawton, and sober. It had been easier to talk to him when he was drunk. She wondered, in a sudden burst of fear, if Mr. Lawton really remembered her. Maybe he was just "picking her up". She turned and looked at him.

He smiled. "I don't remember thanking you for that Good Samaritan job you did the other night. Thank your friend for me, too. What's his name? You're Angie, I know. It's about the only thing I recall about that night, and I'm glad it was you two who found me. I'd hate to have it nosed around that I was drunk, and I know you won't tell anyone."

Angie shook her head, emphatically. "Oh no! I wouldn't think of telling anyone. Tony won't tell either. That's his name--Tony--the boy who was with me. His father has a haberdashery store."

"I see. Is this Tony your boyfriend?"

"No. Just a friend."

"I see."

Now, what could she say? No! She wouldn't talk about the weather. Then, Lawton stopped for a light. "Nice out today, isn't it?" he asked. "Yes," she answered, smiling sickly. Now why had she been afraid to talk about the weather? It was perfectly natural. "It'll be warm soon," she added. "Yes," he agreed. They rode a few blocks in silence.

"Well, kid, there's where you wanted to get out." He pulled up at the corner; Angie climbed out immediately.

"Thanks for the lift, Mr. Lawton."

"That's all right. Well, see you again--I have to hurry. I'm a bit late as it is."

After he drove away, Angie walked to the nearest downtown subway, secure in the knowledge that Mr. Lawton thought she too had an appointment. She wondered how long it would take her to ride home.

The turnstile pursed its lips. Angie searched her pockets, found them laden with everything but money. Oh well, she would walk home--it had been worth it.

The way was long, but Angie did not mind. She walked along briskly, oblivious to the sun and the heat of the sidewalk. She relived the ride, word for word, and by the time she had gone over the entire conversation seven times, she was home, rushing in, slamming the door behind her, racing up the steps and dashing to the piano. She would practice wonderfully today, she knew. It was a nice, inspiring day, so very nice!

...

...

It was a beautiful day, no explaining why. Angie's practicing went smoothly for several hours. When she finally allowed herself an interruption, it was only because Mamma insisted that she eat supper. Angie wasn't adverse to the suggestion; all of her was hungry, including her tingling fingers. Practicing the piano was a strange thing, she thought--there were all kinds of ways to do it. Take the practicing she had done today, for example. It had been one triumph after another. Nothing seemed difficult. She had been able to concentrate, make errors without too much breast-beating, flow evenly from page to page. On other days, ever mistake she made caused her anguish. She would repeat an uneven passage over and over again, move on to the next phrase, and return to the troublesome passage a few minutes later only to find that she had not eliminated the mistake. On such frustrating days, nothing could take her away from the piano, not even Mamma Tartrina's "You come eat supper NOW!" On the other hand, today she could close the lid confidently, knowing that the keys underneath had been justly treated.

Mamma understood immediately when she saw Angie enter the kitchen promptly. "You play good today, eh?"

"Um hmmm..."

"I have very good day today too."

"Anything happen?"

"No, but I think maybe you mamma someday be foreman-lady in Blakestone's Mills."

"Yeh?"

"Si. Minna, she foreman-lady now, she got boyfriend who no like her to work. Soon they get married and Minna have to listen to boyfriend, Billie, his name is."

"And you'll automatically be made foreman?"

"I think yes." Mamma smiled. "But I not sure yet," she added modestly.

What could Angie say?

"It was a beautiful day, Mamma, plain beautiful."

6.

Tony raced up the long stairway, and walked into the living-room without stopping to push the buzzer.

"Hello, Angie."

"Go away, Tony. I'm practicing."

"But it's four-thirty and we have a date."

"We have a date for six-thirty, not four-thirty."

"I know. But the store was rather quiet this afternoon. Pop says business is never any good on Wednesdays, and he let me go at half-past two. So I came over here."

"How come you didn't come at half-past two?"

"I had to get dressed, didn't I?"

"All right, skip it. I was only being funny."

Tony remained standing, becoming a bit uncomfortable. Angie grinned at him, noting the scrubbed, freshly-shaven young face, the immaculate grey sportshirt, and the grey flannel slacks. When Tony looked clean, he looked very clean.

"You can sit down, you know."

Tony sat down and picked up a newspaper. "I didn't mean to disturb you, Angie, honest. If you want, I'll read while you finish doing whatever you're doing. Were you practicing? I didn't hear the piano from outside. If you were playing, I wouldn't have come in."

"You're so considerate!"

"Don't be sarcastic. I didn't mean any harm."

"The road to hell is paved with good intentions."

"I told you that a long time ago."

"What's the difference where I get my quotations? You should be flattered that I thought it was good enough to use. I don't go around quoting everything I hear, you know.

"I am flattered, deeply."

"Now you're being sarcastic."

Tony put aside the newspaper. "What's the matter with us tonight?" he asked, quietly. "All I did wrong was come here too early. It isn't a crime. Why are you biting my ear off?"

"Well, for one thing, you don't treat me the way you'd treat another girl. You wouldn't call for another girl two hours too early."

"But I don't go out with other girls!"

"Maybe you should. We're too young to be going 'steady'. Besides you know you need experience."

Tony winced. Angie didn't know it, but she was hitting a sore point. It had to do with Jonah's excursions to Jason Street while Tony stayed at home. But this was no time to think about that.

"What do you mean by experience, Angie?"

"Well, you know--getting to know other people, girls mainly, andgetting to know how to talk to them and stuff like that."

"What?"

"You know what I mean--how to get along with different types of girls, and all that. You know."

"Huh?"

"Huh what?"

Tony thought quickly and seized upon the first available idea. "You don't go out much with other boys, Angie," he said. "You only see Jonah and me."

"And how would you know who I know and who I see? It so happens that I have a wider circle of acquaintances than you think I have. And diversified."

"Hmmm...diversified too! Hmmm...Hmmm!"

"Tony, stop it!"

"Stop what?"

"Stop making fun of me. I only said I know more people than you think I know, and you should likewise go out and get to know more people. It does things for you."

"You mean it 'broadens' one?"

"Yes, it broadens one."

"Hmmm..."

"Well say something, Tony. All you're saying is 'hmm' and it gets monotonous."

"I don't know what to say. You're talking as if I'm in a rut."

"Maybe you are."

"I am?"

"So do I have to repeat myself? If I said you're in a rut, you're in a rut."

"All of a sudden Angie is a dictator!"

"So don't be so sarcastic."

"Well, aren't you being dictatorial? I don't think I'm in a rut. And by the way, who do you know that I don't know about? Where did you suddenly pick up this 'wide circle of acquaintances'?"

"And diversified."

"And diversified. Do you mean anyone in particular?"

"That's my business. What do you think, that we're twins? I don't know everyone you know, and you certainly don't know everyone I know."

Tony had a vague idea; he pounced on it. "Angie--dear--ahem--do you by any chance mean your friend Mr. Lawton?"

"I mean no one in particular."

"No harm done. I only asked."

The conversation or pseudo-argument burnt out. Angie, looking down at her feet, saw that she was wearing her scuffed brown bedroom slippers, and that the ankles above them were dirty. Furthermore, she remembered that she hadn't combed her hair all day, having begun practicing unwashed, unbreakfasted, and happily unkempt at eight-thirty. When, after two hours, she had paused to eat, she also had dressed herself, but as superficially as possible. Then, she had returned to the piano.

She might have gone uncombed all day, and possibly all evening too, had not Tony arrived in his usual shiny-clean condition. He made her feel self-conscious. More important, talking about Mr. Lawton made her acutely aware of her appearance.

She left the room. "Tony," she called from the bathroom a few minutes later, "did I leave my comb on the piano? Take a look."

He took one. "It's here," he shouted. "Want me to bring it over?"

"Yes, please."

At the bathroom door, Tony discovered that an appendage resembling Angie's hand protruded from it. He slipped the comb into the outstretched palm, and closed the hand's fingers over it. Then, suddenly, he bent down, put his cheek against the hand, for only a second, stood up again, and walked quickly back to the living-room.

Angie, repossessed of her hand, looked bewilderedly at it. For reasons dim to her, she decided to take a shower, a really thorough one, inbetween the toes and all.

When she walked into the livng-room a half-hour later, Tony looked up, surprised. She was cleaned, combed, shod and even stockinged. She wore a skirt and a white blouse, open at the throat.

"You look damned good," he commented. "Now we can go out someplace."

"And what do you mean?" Angie asked, with a touch of vixen. "Couldn't we go out if I were wearing slacks? You getting to be a snob?"

"Angie!"

"Tony!" she mimicked him.

"I didn't mean that, Angie."

"You didn't mean what? You're not very explicit today, are you?"

"I didn't mean we couldn't go out if you were in slacks. I only meant you looked sort of especially gala."

"Isn't it pronounced gal-la?"

"No, it's gay-la." Politely, he added, "I think."

"I'll look it up," Angie offered, and rushed off before he could stop her. It took a few minutes.

"Tony?"

"What?"

"Listen to this. It's very funny. They have a New Words Section."

"So what? That's nothing new."

"No, but listen to these crazy definitions. I mean it's kind of funny to see certain words defined--and listen to how seriously they're defined. They're really funny, no kidding."

"Like for instance?"

"For instance: 'BRONX CHEER (From the Bronx, borough of N.Y. City). An insulting explosive noise made with lips and tongue to express contempt; raspberry . Slang, U.S.' Isn't that funny? There are some

more cuckoo ones too. Let's see--"

"Well?"

"Here's one: 'DOGHOUSE An ignominious state of repudiation or disfavor; esp. in in the doghouse.'

"Angie, you pronounced that wrong. It's ignominious."

"Well, what did I say?"

"Ignommious."

"Sorry."

She turned the pages. "Listen to this one. It's good: 'JITTERBUG (jitter,v. plus bug enthusiast, Slang). Swing Music. A devotee of swing music impelled by the rhythm to wild gesticulations.'"

"I can't do that," Tony commented.

"Can't make definitions?"

"No. Can't jitterbug. I can't even dance. You've been promising to teach me ever since Jonah's party. I felt like an awful dope sitting out all those dances while you were whirling around the floor. You dance rather well. At least it looked good from where I was sitting. By the way, where did you learn, or are girls born knowing how?"

Angie picked at her thumb cuticle. Between glissandoes and picking, it was a sadly lacerated cuticle. She was aware of it now. Would Mr. Lawton notice it if he ever saw her again?

"Well, Tony boy, it's like this. I couldn't dance up until a year ago. Then, we started having dancing sessions in our gym class, just girls. No one taught us--we just danced with each other. I didn't know how, but a few of the girls helped me get started. It's really very easy. Want me to start teaching you now?"

"Right now?"

"Yeh. I'll turn on the radio."

"I don't think I want to learn right now."

"Of course, it's up to you, Tony, but why not?"

"It makes me feel like something of a dope."

"Oh. All right, some other time, OK?"

Angie looked at her watch. It was five-thirty. "Tony," she said. "I'm hungry. I'll make us something to eat." She went into the kitchen. "Coffee and sandwiches all right?" she yelled into the living-room.

Tony followed her. He pulled out his wallet, and waved it. "Look, Angie--I'm rich tonight, honest. Pop paid me, and I didn't even need the money. I had a lot left over from last week. Let's go out and eat, all right?"

Angie considered it. Tony did look escorty, and besides, she was wearing a skirt. Something should be done about it. "OK," she assented. "Only let's not go too far. I want to come back early and get in another hour's practice-session before it gets late. The last time I practiced at night, it was sort of late, and Mrs. Kuller next door started banging on the wall. Mamma felt terrible about it. Now she doesn't talk to Mrs. Kuller and it's really my fault. If I practice at night between eight and nine, it's all right, but if I play even one chord after nine o'clock, Mrs. Kuller threatens to call the police."

"She," Tony pronounced, shaking his index finger, "does not appreciate art. She is definitely a mean menace!" He laughed. "When I get rich, I'll buy you some soundproofing. But I'm surprised you pay any attention to her."

"I wouldn't listen to her, but Mamma gets so crazy upset. I don't know what she's afraid of. Even if Mrs. Kuller called the police, they couldn't do anything, could they?"

"I don't know, Angie. Maybe they could claim you were disturbing the peace."

"In this neighborhood? I don't know how it is on your block, but here there just isn't any peace. Two guys got drunk last night and started singing 'The Music Goes Round and Round' right on our stoop. Remember that old song?"

"Not well. I was a kid when it came out. Hey, so were you--even younger."

"Pulling rank, huh?"

"No. Come on--let's go out. Where shall we eat?"

"Let's go over to Max's. It's very near."

"That dump?"

"Well, it's near, isn't it?"

"All right, if you insist."

Angie made a final trip to the bathroom. She did two things she had never done before, at least not both together. For one, she let the water run, so Tony would not hear her own sounds. For another, she washed her hands carefully, with soap, after completion. This was a peculiar evening, she thought. Something was making her do all kinds of strange things.

...

At about the same time Angie was flushing the toilet, Lawton's employer, the First President, the eminent Frederick Peter Caswell, was saying to him, "Al, could you go out and grab some supper and then

...

come back about eight-thirty? I finally made that appointment with Gardner Ryan. He'll be here at nine. You know more about that Bar Road deal than I do. Would this inconvenience you?"

"No, of course not," said Lawton. "I intended to work somewhat late tonight anyway. Besides, I've become very interested in that deal."

"Good, son, good!" said the First President. "You continue working as you have been, and I assure you we won't forget you come bonus-time!"

"I wasn't thinking of reward, sir!" said Mr. Lawton, very, very sincerely.

"Certainly, son. I know you have higher motives, but the firm does like to reward diligence. You won't be forgotten!"

"Thank you," Lawton said to the retiring back of the First President.

As soon as he heard the poundful plop of his employer settling down at his desk, Lawton walked automatically to the Men's Room. He looked in the mirror. Not so good, he thought, those were new bags under his eyes.

He washed his face. Mechanically, he went through the pre-meal routine. After he had cleaned his fingernails, he returned to his desk. He picked up the phone, called off his personal appointments for the evening (there had been two, rather second-class), bade a mental farewell for the night to the Jupiters and Merchant Princes, and departed, hat in hand, for what he called the"local grease-bowl". What was the use of traveling to a good restaurant? He would have to eat alone anyway, since both tentative appointments had not included dinner. Besides, he was tired. He would not eat much, he decided. He would probably have to have a late supper with his boss and Gardner Ryan.

He wished, for only a broken moment, that he had at least one friend who was always available for times such as now. Someone he could phone and say, "Come down and meet me for a short-order dinner. I have to work late tonight, but right now, I'm sort of lonely."

"I'm sort of lonely." He had never said that, in all his life, and he wondered what the words would sound like, were he to say them aloud. He whispered them, and was ashamed. But what if he said them casually? He half laughed at the thought, an aborted, bitter laugh. Loneliness was not casual, and not even he, with his studied speech and premeditated gestures could make it less than the grim thing it was. Lately, it had become worse. The loneliness had become personified, or vocalized, had formed the habit of coming to him in the guise of a little whisper that said to him, even when he was with the noblest of noble princes, "You don't like this. You'd like to hire the phony lot of them as office boys, that's all they're good for. Christ, Al, don't you see? You want someone to talk to!"

He stilled the voice, now as he had done before, and wondered if he was in his second childhood. That was a joke, he thought. Second childhood--he had not even had a first one.

Where was Sandy? Sandy with the dark hair and the too-much lipstick. Probably married by now. He hadn't seen her in a year; she wouldn't waste that much time. Not Sandy of the cynical smile, not that one, the only human being, male or female, who could see through him, look away, seem to say, "No, not that. I don't want it."

What if he phoned her tonight? Of course she would be married by now, probably to a merchant prince. They would invite him to dinner, no doubt, and he would find himself being the bright, eternal

young man with an extra-special merchant prince, one who had Sandy for a wife, not somebody named Georgia, or Evelyn, or Jeannette. Damn his pompous hide--fat, stuffed happy prince!

Maybe she wasn't married. And then what? Could he phone her, ask to see her for--the corny words stuffed his throat--for old time's sake? She might consider dining with him, not tonight, but some other time perhaps, if she were not married, that is. But should he phone to ask?

She would laugh at him; she would say something fast, clever and meaningful about the quaint custom of keeping touch with old friends. If she were married, she would tell him as quickly as possible, and with exaggerated calm, perhaps a shade offhand. She would say something like this: "Al? My husband and I were talking of you the other evening." It was not Sandy's habit to say things in direct, informative statements. She could not possibly say, "Hello, Al. I'm married." If she could, it would permit him to decide on future action. There were only two possibilities, of course: He could resume the friendship, if he could call it that, on a social basis. He could be a "friend of the family." Sandy might have children--no, it had only been a year, perhaps one child--and would she expect him to be "Uncle" Al? Uncle --to Sandy's child?

He berated himself for being silly. Speculations of the sort in which he was indulging should be part of the thought processes of adolescents only. Al, he told himself--let's face it rationally. The facts, Al, the facts! All right, here we go: One: I have not seen Sandy for a full year. Two: I have heard nothing about her for the same length of time. Three: It was a clean break. Whether or not it should have been is not to be decided now. However--that should be

four: A clean break is not casual. Therefore, and that's Five: A resumption of the relationship must not be offhand. Six? It would hurt neither of us if I phoned and said hello, would it?

In the phone booth, he discovered he had not forgotten her number, but he dialed Information merely to check himself.

"EVergreen Ay-it, tha-ree, tha-ree, oh ny-un!"

"Thank you, operator."

He dialed. There were two rings and an immediate answer. It was a woman's voice.

"Hello. Is this Sandy?" Lawton asked. (It didn't sound like her.)

"No, this is Joan, her roommate."

"Roommate?" (Al! Stop repeating her words.)

"Yes. The housing shortage, you know. Who is this, please?"

"My name is--tell her it's an old friend. When do you expect her home?"

"Late tonight. Can't give you the exact hour, naturally. Care to leave a message?"

"No. By the way, Jean, there's something I'd like to ask you..."

"The name is Joan."

"Sorry." (Al, shut up. Do you intend to ask a stranger if your Sandy is married. No! She can't be! She has a roommate!)

"What did you want to ask?"

"It seems to have slipped my mind. Well, thank you, Joan. Goodbye."

"Goodbye."

Lawton returned to his table. When Max rushed to him, beaming as always, Lawton gave him his order. Then he remembered that he had another phone call to make. He went back to the booth.

...

Many, many times Tony had tried to hold doors open for Angie. Was it his fault that she maintained a crude independence in minor matters such as procession into a room? Tonight, thought Tony, he would not object. He had never succeeded; therefore, he would not even try to do what he considered the gentlemanly thing.

However, tonight Angie was amenable to all rules of prescribed good conduct. Tony, flexible but not rapidly so, was thunderstruck when he saw Angie standing quietly in front of the door to Max's, waiting for him to open it for her. After a moment, he did so, and Angie walked in. If it had not been Angie, Tony would have described it by saying, "She flounced in." Such was Angie's mood. It might last; who knew? It might even last until tomorrow. Tonight, she was neither half-child, nor half-woman; she was all ingenue. Tony perceived this only in part, but he was sufficiently well-mannered to play his role, also in part.

Angie saw Lawton's hat on the rack above the last table. She knew it was his hat the same way she knew his automobile's license plate numbers. Lawton was not in sight. Leading Tony to the table, she paused, and consistent with her new-found personality, she turned to her escort and said, politely, "Shall we sit here?"

"Someone's sitting here already," he answered. "There's a hat hanging."

"It's probably the proprietor's."

"Why would he want to keep it out here?"

"I'm sure I don't know. What's the difference?"

"Well, if you want to sit here..."

"Yes, I do. Come on, let's sit down and stop wasting time."

Tony gave up, and seated himself. He did not think of holding Angie's chair for her, until he noticed that Angie, extremist throughout, was still standing. He scurried around the table and waited until she sat down. Then, somewhat clumsily, for Angie was sitting with full weight, he pushed her chair forward. The procedure was new to both of them. Once completed, they smiled at each other with unspoken pride. It occurred to Tony that this was a memorable evening.

Lawton, in the phone booth, glanced at his table and saw Angie and Tony. He grinned with one side of his mouth. They weren't what he had planned for in the way of company, but no matter; he did want company.

"Hello," he said, when he returned. "May I sit down?"

"Of course," murmured Angie.

"Hello," muttered Tony.

"Is really your table, Mr. Lawton!" said Max, approaching with Lawton's dinner. Max was always anxious to preserve property rights.

Lawton smiled, wanly. "These young people are friends of mine," he told Max, who beamed, comforted, and rubbed his hands on his apron.

Angie ordered. "I only want a cheese sandwich and coffee." Tony doubled the order, and Max left them.

Suddenly, inexplicably, Angie wished that Tony would calmly, deftly and temporarily drop dead, or at least unconscious for a while, until the time for a rapid reincarnation, perhaps two hours hence. Tony, with the same suddenness, wished that he and Angie were someplace else. The mood, the beautiful mood, the blouse, the skirt, the evening--and Lawton. It spoiled everything. Tony squirmed.

Lawton's self-assurance waned when he realized he had two independent audiences. He ate his dinner in semi-silence, broken by occasional half-smiles and half-started sentences which gained no response. Angie, with determination, concentrated on eating her sandwich, which thereupon vanished. She turned to her coffee, drinking it solemnly, staring at the liquid. Tony merely ate.

At last, Lawton's cigarette was lit, all three cups of coffee downed, the cups and saucers removed. Lawton grew weary of trying to make conversation, simultaneously addressing an admiring Angie and an angry, twitching Tony. He turned to Angie:

"I worked in this neighborhood before, some twenty years ago. I remember I had trouble selling--encyclopedias, I think. I made as little as one sale in three days. Wait! I bet I can remember the name of the man I sold the books to--let me see--it was an Italian name, Cellini or Clini--now I have it--Collini! The man had a haberdashery, a few streets away from here, if I recall correctly. It was a well-stocked store. I figured that if anyone could afford to buy a set of encycs, it would be this man, Collini. I wonder if he still lives around here. Kindly fellow. I'd like to thank him some day. He was my first sale; I'm sure if I hadn't made it, I'd have given up and turned to ditch-digging."

Tony shook his head, pining over a secret sorrow. Irony. All those years he had spent poring over the encyclopedias--and Lawton had been the man to sell them to his father! Lawton, this worn-out businessman who was ruining his evening.

Angie wanted to blurt out that Tony was " this man Collini's" son, but she restrained herself. Tony should have the honor of

revelation. She looked at him, expectantly, and he obliged in a dull voice.

"The Collini you sold the books to is my father. As a matter of fact, I was weaned on them." In semi-embarrassment, he pulled out his wallet, and commenced fingering the clippings in the inner pocket. Why did he have to add the part about being weaned on them? Now Lawton knew how young he was.

Lawton was unaware of him. He continued to reminisce:

"Sometimes I wish I were in the book business now. It was a very varied life. Rewarding, too. I remember the best time I ever had was selling books to the inmates of a mental hospital."

Angie was fascinated. "How did you get in?"

Lawton explained with a wave of his hand and a little smile, his own slightly crooked, slightly sad smile. "I just walked in and held some of the books on my arm. I was in the ante-room, and when the receptionist walked out for a minute, I walked right into the corridor. Two men came over to me. They wore white smocks, and I assumed they were attendants. They started pulling books off my arm; all I did was name a price for every item they picked. After awhile, a mixed group came over to me, about five men and one woman. All the men bought books, money on the spot. As I was ready to leave, the woman drew me aside, and whispered in my ear that she was really a nurse, and she wasn't allowed to let the men see strangers (they were all inmates, I discovered, including the first two who had approached me) but she thought it would do them some good to have books. I asked her if they were capable of understanding them, and she said some could and some couldn't, but it didn't really matter. She said that the important thing was to let them feel they <u>owned</u> something, all by

themselves."

"Weren't you sort of unscrupulous?" Tony asked. "You weren't allowed into the corridor, and you went in as soon as the receptionist's back was turned." It was an open offensive, but Lawton only laughed. "It was the receptionist's fault, Tony," he said. "I'd fire a receptionist who left her post without getting a replacement. Most organizations have a girl in the office who serves as a relief operator, or receptionist when the regulars one can't be at her desk. You really can't expect to find efficiency in a place like a hospital. The only time you get functional efficiency is when there are dollars and cents involved."

Tony shrugged his shoulders. He turned back to his wallet, climbed in and remained there, fastening the snapper behind him. Angie, who was not interested in economics or business policy, liked the way Lawton looked while he was speaking.

Lawton's nostalgia was growing--Sandy's fault! "There's something about selling books," he said, "and it used to amaze me. I suppose I should have become accustomed to it in time, but it remained a constant surprise. Let me tell you about one particular case."

"What happened?" Angie was leaning on her elbows, intent on missing nothing.

"Well, it seems I covered an office building once--no names need be mentioned--but it was the most exclusive, hardest-to-rent-space-in building in this city. I wasn't merely peddling books. I had ten rare volumes, and I was seeing five of the wealthiest businessmen in the building. Very often, they're collectors. I sometimes suspect they never read the books, but they're collectors; it gives them something to show off a little, and I suppose were all a bit like that."

Tony felt personally affronted. "Are we?" he asked. "I don't collect; I read!" Lawton calmed him. "Of course, son," he said. "I don't deny that there are honest scholars. I was only taking something of a pot-shot at my own ex-profession."

Angie gave Tony a dirty look. "Go ahead, Mr. Lawton," she urged.

"Well, as I was saying, I was seeing five hand-picked businessmen. Each one had an enormous office, well-appointed, complete with secretaries and office-boys. Each one of the five in turn listened to me, but when I threw authors' and translators' names at them, not to mention titles, it was obvious that they didn't know what I was talking about. Further, they made no pretense of knowing. Perhaps I should have given them credit for honesty.

"I was thoroughly discouraged after seeing the fifth executive. He was in textiles. I decided to call it a day, so I packed up and walked out into the ante-room (of the textile man). Then, the oddest thing happened: A little guy, about sixty-five years old, came over to me. He was a porter. I'd seen him sweeping the floor when I'd first come in. Now, he looked tired and grimy. 'Son,' he said, 'Did I hear you say you have an old edition of Blake's Thel? I would like to see it, son, if you don't mind.'

"So I gave it to him, telling him he could look at it for awhile. There was something pathetic about the way he wiped his hands first. You know, there is something about the book business--one gets to learn whether or not a rare book means something to a man, merely by watching the way he handles it. This porter's hands were all gentleness on the book. After he examined the flyleaf, he seemed to be almost sparkling. But no matter how excited he was--he was very

excited, in a restrained way--he still remembered to handle the book carefully.

"I'll buy it,son, if it doesn't cost too much. This is the finest Thel I've ever seen!'

"I quoted the regular price and he accepted it. I was younger, then. If it had happened now, I might have asked a lower price. Isn't it odd, Angie? There, in that building, and the only sale I made was to the porter. But it was a satisfied deal all around. There's one sale that won't ever ask for a refund!"

Lawton and Angie smiled at each other, while Angie whispered, "It was wonderful!"

Tony pulled a limp dollar bill out of his wallet, and left, abruptly, to pay the cashier. Angie, remaining, seized the moment. WI'm glad we bumped into you, Mr. Lawton." She lowered her head, half-closing her eyes. In years to come, she might laugh at this momentary demureness, but at the moment, it seemed right. Lawton smiled, less sadly than usual. "No gladder than I," he said. "I hope the three of us run into each other again sometimes."

Over my lacerated body, thought Tony, who had returned. "Ready to go, Angie?" he asked, impatiently.

They said their goodbyes. When Angie and Tony were at the coor, Angie turned her head and caught Lawton's eye. She flushed, but he calmed her by screwing his face into mock seriousness, and making a small, quick, jesting salute. She laughed at him, and walked out with Tony.

Lawton, buttoning his jacket, wondered briefly if he had been weak or wise to reminisce out loud. It was all right, he decided. Besides, it had been so long since he'd had an audience sufficiently

appreciative to sit quietly through a long story. Telling anecdotes was one thing, and he was always assured of listeners, the standard group of small-party listeners who considered him a source of ever-young amusement. "Al--" they would say. "He's a sober, serious lad--but he can sure tell a good joke!" The story he had told Angie was not a joke. It was somewhat poignant, he reflected. Sort of sweet, the way she had responded to it. He thought of what would happen if he were to tell that story at a gathering of merchant princes and their wives. He knew, immediately, that he would have to revise it, make the porter seem like a funny or ludicrous character. He would have to create a punch line. Were he to tell it straight, there would surely be someone to say, "But what's the joke, Al?" No joke, no joke at all, but they wouldn't understand. He hardly expected them to.

He wanted to phone Sandy again. Something had steadied him, perhaps the dark coffee, perhaps the conversation. Whatever it was, he knew that he'd be less self-conscious in the phone booth if he phoned now. Too bad it was time to return to the office.

...

Angie and Tony walked most of the way home without talking. As they passed the alley in which they had buried the bird, Angie remarked, "I wonder if the worms have eaten it yet." Ordinarily, Tony would have made fun of her cynical moments. All he said now was, "They probably have." Without looking at her, he muttered, "Care to dig it up and see?"

"No," Angie answered. "I'll try to remember the bird as it was."

"Escapist, huh?"

"No. Maybe I'm an idealist, though."

Tony stopped walking. "Let's dig up the bird," he commanded, and turned into the alley. Angie followed, urging him all the while to continue homeward. He was gruff, and strangely adamant. In a few minutes, she understood.

As they knelt in the semi-darkness, touching the earth, searching for the stone that marked the burial-place, a thought came gropingly to Angie. Tony seemed to be behaving in a manner unlike him. Another minute, and he pulled her to her feet, throwing his arms around her in a rough bear hug. She shoved him away, and ran out of the alley, on toward her home. He followed, also running, immune to the stares of the weary, perspiring people who were sitting on their front steps trying to grasp the shy, ephemeral breeze.

He caught up with her at her doorstep. The only way he could prevent her from entering the house was by holding her hand, which he did, forcibly.

"Angie," he pleaded. "Please listen."

"Go away!" she growled. "You were terrible all evening, and then to make everything worse, you went and dragged me into that alley!"

"Angie, please listen to me, please! It's just that I've never kissed you, and I've wanted to--I'm sorry." He dropped her hand, turned and walked away.

Mamma Tartrina was asleep when Angie let herself into the apartment. Angie undressed herself, washed, and climbed into bed, only to arise a few minutes later. She went to the window, fingered the cracked paint of the pane, and the dust on the sill. The city-summer air was foul. She sniffed it abstractedly, shook her head, and pushed the window a half-foot higher. She shook her head again, confusedly, and returned to bed.

7.

Saturday night, at seven o'clock, Angie was at her piano when the buzzer sounded. It could not have been Tony, who never rang the bell downstairs or used the buzzer outside the apartment. Angie opened the door, and there he was.

"Hello."

"Go away, Mr. Collini."

"Angie, listen--I wouldn't have come, except that something terrible happened yesterday. My father had a heart attack. He feels better now. He's resting in bed, now, and he'll have to stay off his feet at least a week, so I'll work in the store until he's better, work full-time. After that, we'll have to figure out something so he doesn't have to work so hard all the time. We've been trying to get him to hire more help--he had nobody at all up until a few months ago. Now he has one clerk, full-time, and me part-time. After the way I behaved Wednesday night, I wouldn't have come back, except that it's so important--I guess I never thought of my father being able to get sick--I was sort of upset, and well I always come to you when I feel bad. It's all right, isn't it?"

Sympathy for her old friend rushed up and claimed Angie. "Of course," she said. " Sit down and take a load off your feet. Can you stay awhile, or do you have to go straight home again?"

"Oh, I can stay! Mom's taking care of Pop tonight. He's much better today; the worst part is over."

"Tony..."

"What?"

"I'm sorry I blew up like that the other night. According to the

book, I did the wrong thing. "

"What book--or aren't you being literal?"

"I guess I really mean the column in the newspaper. I saw it Thursday. Some girl wrote in and asked to know what does she do when someone tries to kiss her, and the answer was to be calm and talk the man out of it, only to do it in such a way that his feelings aren't hurt. So I started thinking about how I'd acted, and I realized I was all wrong to get angry like I did. So I'm sorry."

Tony sat down, surprised, greatly relieved--and magnanimous. "Well, think nothing of it, Angie. I fogged up, forgot to be a gentleman for a little while. We all make mistakes."

"No, it wasn't your fault."

"Well, maybe it wasn't, come to think of it--it's so hard sometimes to see you the way I want to. Take Wednesday night, for instance. I wanted it to be like--you know--me knocking at your door at seven-thirty, as if I had come from another city, or at least another neighborhood, and you would open the door and smile as if I were the most important man in this whole generation, and I'd come in and wait for you, and when you were ready to leave, we'd go down and get into my car--I'd have a car--and we'd drive off to a good restaurant--not Max's--and have a quiet dinner by candlelight."

"Yes?" Angie asked.

"Angie," he continued, "Angie, nothing happens right--we couldn't even eat by ourselves. That man Lawton had to be in Max's, and once you saw him, I might as well have been dead. Possibly I'm not interesting to be with--half the time I can't say what I mean--and I think if I could, you'd become bored with me. You wouldn't want to hear every single day that you're the poetry and the music and the autumn and a million other things that sound terrible when I say them.

You'd get angry at me, and go storming out. You'd say I was giving you a speech from a windy book. I guess I'm beaten no matter what I do--when it comes to you, that is."

Angie broke his mood by throwing a pillow at him. "Here, catch! You're a cuckoo bookworm. Bet you can't even catch a pillow, you old library hound!" He caught it, and tossed it back at her. She giggled and threw it at him again, aiming at his head.

Mamma Tartrina walked in, and quickly stepped out of the way. "Che cosa! Bambini! You too big to play like crazy! Allo, Tony. How you Poppa? I hear he no feel good."

So Mamma had known about it! "Why didn't you tell me?" Angie asked.

"What, Angelina--you no knew? Every day you see Tony. Why he no tell you? Tony--you Poppa all right now?"

"He's feeling better, Mrs. Tartrina. Have you just come from the movies?"

"Si. Good picture--I see only one, other I saw before--in plenty rich color. So pretty. Tony, you tell you Poppa that he get well quick and take you Mamma and you to go see picture. Is about Indian girl and Italian man. They no can marry because he run away from army and have to go to jail. But at end, everything OK again. Army says OK to man. He get free and go marry little Indian girl. Very pretty picture. You go see."

Angie was not satisfied. "But Mamma, if the Indian girl was an American Indian, how did the Italian boy meet her? I mean did he come to America, or did she go to Italy? And what's the name of the picture?"

Mamma explained. "She American Indian and he American Italian. I no remember name of picture, but is very pretty."

"How did you know he was Italian?" Tony asked.

"He look like."

"Oh," nodded Angie. Tony grinned.

Mamma slapped her thigh. "Ah, you both make fun of me--is not nice. All I do is go see picture. I like, so I come home and tell you go see, because I want you should enjoy it too, and you make fun of me. Why you no ask how I know Indian girl is Indian? She look like, that's all, so I know. Angie, you come eat supper now. Tony, you too. Wait here, I go make."

She went into the kitchen, and in a few minutes the faded paint of the ceiling mixed with the steam of heating water. Soon also came the necessary accompaniment to Mamma Tartrina's cooking--Mamma's lyrical voice. Only this time she did not sing a Neapolitan donkey-song. Instead, and Angie and Tony in the living-room listened, and were pleased--instead she sang something that sounded like an old Indian love chant. The words she did not know, and she knew few of them, she filled in with Neapolitan phrases. The effect was almost exotic.

"When I get rich, Tony said, "I'll buy you a recording machine. Then you could stay here and record your Mamma's singing without her knowing about it. It's really very exotic stuff. I've never heard anything like it."

Angie laughed at him. Tony had a way of making everything Mamma did or said seem fascinating, and very, very right. "Stay for supper, Tony? Please?"

"Sure," he said, "sure!" He rolled up his sleeves, grinning at her. "Might as well make myself comfortable," he said. She grinned back at him. They were friends again.

...

After Mamma had left for work on Tuesday, Angie dressed in slacks and settled herself at the piano. She played until the perspiration under her arms began to chafe her. A bath! It was an evil-smelling bath under and in her armpits, and Angie found after a few minutes that she could not play the piano happily and sweat profusely at the same time.

After bathing, she went into her bedroom, put on a slip, pink and smooth, and surveyed her fresh self in the mirror. She would look better, she realized , if her hair was combed, especially after the mussing effect of the bathing cap. She started to comb it. She would, she decided, do a good handsome job, and then go take a walk around the neighborhood, managing to show up at Max's at about one o'clock. She combed, almost happily, grateful to nobody in particular, perhaps herself, because somehow, she had decided how to spend the next few hours without drowning in her own perspiration. It was much better knowing what to do than sitting around trying to practice, and knowing that an hour under intense heat was equal to perhaps a mere fifteen cool minutes. She felt a half-started twinge of conscience because she wasn't at the piano, but no matter, no matter--things couldn't continue at an even pace all the time.

Abstractedly, she remembered that the hall door was open. Again, no matter. The house was always quiet in mid-morning.

She heard footsteps, slow, shuffling, and very strange. In the mirror, she saw a young man, standing in the bedroom doorway, oily-haired and sloppy. She whirled around quickly, grabbing an old nailfile from the dresser-top. The young man smiled and said nothing. Angie looked at him and saw that his fly was open.

"Get out!" she hissed. The man smiled at her. She held the nailfile as if it were a dagger, pointing it at him. He giggled. His face, Angie observed in a half-paralysis, was almost immobile, even when he giggled. He stared at her, now, his smile rigid in his face.

"Get out of here!" Angie shouted. The man opened his mouth, preparing to speak. He wet his lips leisurely, rhythmically. Then he said, "What-are-you-afraid-of? I-won't-touch-you," with spaces between the words.

"No?" said Angie, curiously. "Then just wait here for a minute. I won't run away." He nodded at her, and smiled contentedly. Angie, still holding the nailfile in a menacing way, reached for her slacks and jumped into them, grateful for all the practice she had in rapid dressing. "I'll be able to talk to you in a minute," she reminded the visitor, meanwhile buttoning herself into a blouse. "Now," she said, "let's go into the other room. It's much nicer there."

The man didn't move. "I-like-it-here," he said, savoring each word, licking his lips.

"But I don't," said Angie.

The man seemed to be thinking; he wrinkled his forehead and squinted his eyes. "All-right," he finally answered. "You--you--won't-run-away-will-you?"

"No," Angie assured him. Apparently he believed her, because he

turned and went into the living-room. Angie followed him cautiously. In the living-room, to her surprise, he looked around him, shook his head sadly, saying nothing.

"What's the matter?" Angie asked. He continued shaking his head. After a while, she looked down at his trousers, and tried not to gasp. He looked down at his trousers, too. Finally, he pointed to the fly.

Angie crossed her fingers, and prayed wordlessly. She waited for him to speak. He did. "It's-open," he said, curiously, still pointing to his fly. Angie squeezed her crossed fingers together and prayed some more. "Well, close it," she said. For answer, the man looked at her dumbly, his head cocked to one side, like a bewildered puppy-dog. "Close--it?" he asked. "Yes," Angie repeated. "Close it, because it's open."

He fumbled limply for the zipper's head, found it, and pulled it up in short, seemingly frightened jerks. When he had the fly smoothed, he looked at Angie, his head still cocked. He said, in a dry whisper, "I'm--hungry."

Uncrossing her fingers, Angie wondered if she would frighten him if she laughed. Hungry, that was all he was! The fly--that might have been a mistake or an accident. It could happen--like a girl forgetting to put on her panties when she dressed in the morning. Maybe if the front door had been locked, he would have knocked and asked for food, as simple as all that. It really was her own fault. She had no business leaving the door wide open. It was like saying come in. What to do with him now? Why, feed him, of course. There wouldn't be any ice in the box, so there wasn't anything really good

to eat, but there was bread, and she could open a can of salmon. Besides, there were a few cans of green peas. She could provide some sort of meal for him, even if the combination of food wouldn't be too orthodox.

"Come," she said to him, and led him into the kitchen. She motioned for him to sit down, and he did, blinking his left eye nervously. He was silent, sitting there almost humbly, watching her as she opened a can of peas and poured them into a pot. Suddenly, he jumped to his feet and clutched the ledge of the table. Angie was so startled that she dropped the can opener.

In the doorway, Jonah stood, scratching his head. Angie remembered that the door was still open. The newcomer glanced first at the strange young man, and then at Angie. "What's going on?" he asked with his eyes. Angie smiled at him,relieved and confused. "Jonah," she began to explain, "this is a young man who's having lunch with me today. How about you? Want to eat too?"

"What's your name?" Jonah demanded, turning to the stranger. The man at the table shook his head. Jonah approached him, grimly. "Who are you?" he asked. No answer. Instead, the man at the table turned to Angie. "I'm-hungry," he said.

Angie shook her head at Jonah. The stranger nailed his gaze onto the cooking pot. He watched it with his lips parted. When the pot was warm, Angie poured half of its contents into a bowl, pea-juice included. She put it in front of the stranger, motioning Jonah to give him a fork. She did it herself when she saw that Jonah did not understand her gesture. Then, she opened a can of salmon and made a sandwich.

The man finished devouring the peas. He stood up roughly, bumping into the table. "Thank--you," he said in his slow, disjointed way. "I--want--to--gow--now," he added, wiping his forehead.

Angie nodded, approaching him with the sandwich in her hand. "Here," she said. "Take this." He took it, graspingly, with blackened fingernails digging into the soft bread. "I--was--hungry," he said, and walked out.

When the man was gone, Jonah sat down and lit a cigarette. He looked at Angie as if she were a child in need of scolding. "Now looka here, Tart, will you kindly explain to me what the hell this was all about?"

"There's no need to."

"No need to! Don't tell me that character was a friend of yours!"

"Not exactly. He just walked in and said he was hungry."

"Was the door open, or did you open it for him?"

"It was open."

"Bright girl. Want a medal?" His face turned into a scowl. "Look, baby, you aren't my girl, so it's none of my big business, but didn't your mother ever give out with the speech about strange men?"

"Yes, but this was different."

"Sure, baby, sure. With a character like you, everything is different!"

"So?"

"And you say when this man came in, it didn't faze you?"

"Not for too long."

"I quit." He picked up a slice of bread and ate it, folded in half, butterless. ""Angie, I think you need a spanking."

"No, Jonah--let me explain."

He laughed at her. "No, Tart, let me explain. I'll make it nice and scientific, like you and Tony like. It goes like this: A. You should know better than to leave the door open. B. When a strange man walks in, and I don't think you're bright enough to remember for the next time, all you do is yell. Yell as loud as you can. C. Stop being such an innocent character. Not all men are hungry that way when they come prowling."

Angie wanted peace. "OK," she said appeasingly. "I promise to think about it, about everything you've said, Jonah. Only one thing--"

"What?"

"Just this. Don't tell Tony about today, and the man who wandered in."

"Why not?"

"He'd get upset."

"So? He's got a right to know about it."

"But I think it would be better not to worry him."

Jonah ground out his cigarette. "OK," he agreed, finally. "But it's the God's honest truth--if you don't get sensible, I'll make you."

Angie nodded. She assumed Jonah was having some kind of tantrum, and the best thing would be for him to be appeased, so that he would go home quickly. "It'll be all right," she told him. "Don't worry."

He sighed, emitting an amoebic mass of smoke. "OK. Now I'll go," he said.

Later, the mailman came with the electric bill. Angie thought idly of the Music School Scholarship her teacher had mentioned in the spring. She wondered if she could get further information about

it at the School, decided no, decided it would be very much more proper to wait for something to happen. It might not look good to the School if she were too anxious.

Now, should she try to practice? Certainly. At least that was doing something constructive. It was cooler now, for some strange reason. It would be silly to go to Max's now, especially since she had eaten. Sitting around Max's would be a waste of time now, especially since Lawton was probably back in his office, his lunch finished.

Sitting around worrying was a waste of time in general. Whatever happened, she could take care of herself. If she got the scholarship, all right. If not, all right too.

People were foolish when they worried. Look at Jonah. Very unlike him. He had behaved exactly like Tony. Very silly and unnecessary. What, she wondered, did he mean by the last-minute speech? Did he think she was Tony's girlfriend for life or something? Very silly.

She thought of the stranger. There had been something terribly sad about him. Where would he get his next meal?

She reached for an apple, and returned to the piano.

8.

Thursday morning, Angie woke up at ten o'clock. She had definitely overslept. The house was deserted, even devoid of the echo of Mamma who had gone to work some three hours before. Angie lay abed, musing on her lost practicing-time. The period between eight-thirty and ten was the most important loss. There were many reasons, but the most obvious one was that it was cooler in the early morning than it was all day. She couldn't practice at night because of the woman next door, that Mr. Kuller creature. She and her nine o'clock curfew!

Angie thought about Mrs. Kuller who was more and more becoming her first and worst enemy. True, she had not spoken to the woman face-to-face for many months. Mrs. Kuller's shrill cry, "Stop that piano-playing so late at night, or I'll call the police!" was delivered through the walls. No face was needed; the tone was sufficient. Odd--no one else ever complained.

Now, there were sounds in the apartment next door. Someone seemed to be pushing furniture over chunky blocks of granite. Maybe Mrs. Kuller was moving out! Someone was crying, a soft, restrained sobbing. It could not be Mrs. Kuller: she would probably beat her breast and kick the walls in accompaniment to her tears. But who could it be? Mrs. Kuller lived alone. Suddenly all noises ceased, and the entire apartment was silent. Angie returned to her thoughts about how she hated the neighborhood. She lay abed and had a fantasy: Mrs. Kuller would knock at her door, and tell Angie that she had a daughter (she had no children) who wanted to learn to play the piano. She would

ask Angie to give lessons to the girl. Angie would listen, her arms folded, her eyes grim. As soon as Mrs. Kuller would stop talking, Angie would reply scoffingly, without looking at Mrs. Kuller, and concentrating, instead on a newspaper with which she would pretend to be preoccupied. "Mrs. Kuller," she would say, "some people should never have anything to do with music. If your daughter is related to you, and I must assume she is, she could not possibly be a devotee of the arts! Good afternoon, Mrs. Kuller!" (It would be afternoon, of course.) Oh yes, Angie would not even ask Mrs. Kuller to sit down. She would force her to remain a standing supplicant who would feel inferior because Angie would be seated comfortably.

Angie's fantasies were usually realistic. In all of them, of course, she spoke more carefully than was her custom, but she still sounded like herself, she thought. Furthermore, she never chose absolutely impossible situations. Lately, though, she had taken to speculations about Mr. Lawton. She would encounter him somewhere far, far away from the neighborhood. Inspired by the strangeness of their surroundings, she and Mr. Lawton would greet each other as equals. She would no longer be a neighborhood girl. She would be a young woman from some place else, any place; Mr. Lawton would recognize her as such. She dared not carry the thought further. It gave her a peculiar sensation of elevators-in-the-stomach. It was not, she thought, a healthy way to feel before breakfast. She did not know why it might be unhealthy, but she rebelled against it intuitively. Was it natural to have such sensations merely by thinking about a man? Surely Tony was a man, too, at least more men than boy, and he never provoked such thoughts. Perhaps there was something wrong with Tony? No, that was silly; she rejected it with finality. It was her own fault. After all,

how many men did she know? There were only a handful: Mr. Lawton (elevators), Tony (no elevators), Jonah (certainly no elevators), Maurice Plinocki, who used to play the violin duets with her in school (definitely no elevators; besides, he didn't like girls at all), neighborhood young men (absolutely no elevators; Angie did not want to know them; they wore flashy neckties, the kind that Tony's father included in his wares; Tony laughed at such ties).

Perhaps in the winter she might meet men who would cause elevators in her stomach. But then, were elevators good? Were they not some sign of an inner illness? Angie suddenly wished she had a girl friend, someone with whom to compare notes. Did these things happen to other girls? Come to think of it, why didn't she have any girl friends? That was easily answered. Before she was ten years old, she did not play with other girls because they laughed at her. She remembered how Becky-Anne Thasser--she probably still lived in the neighborhood--had once said, "You can't be a real girl, Angelina Tartrina, not when you're always running around like a boy!" The others among the neighborhood young females said nothing; they merely looked askance at Angie who used to go to the local park merely to find trees to climb. Becky-Anne Thasser had been worse. She had spoken outright to Angie, while the others only showed disapproval with their eyes.

"Angelina Tartrina, what tree are you going to climb today?" That was a Becky-type question. Angie recalled her usual answer. "Ah, go drown!" She reflected on her rudeness, but it had been provoked, hadn't it?

There was a door closing; it was Mrs. Kuller's door. Angie heard footsteps, heavy, shoe-loose. Whoever was making the footsteps was

panting heavily. There was a knock at Angie's door.

Angie, still wearing her pajama top, pulled on a pair of slacks, and went to the door. If it was Tony, he would have to accept her with her hair uncombed. She must remember to comb it very carefully next time, to make up for now. But it couldn't be Tony; he was working today. Maybe the hungry man was back?

It was Mrs. Kuller who appeared, the ogre herself, but a helpless-looking ogre now, heavily-breathing, and with brimming eyes. Angie stared at her, immediately forgot her fantasy, and found herself filled with a certain indefinable sadness.

"What's the matter?" Angie asked.

Mrs. Kuller spoke rapidly. "It's my mother. She came to visit last night, had a bad heart attack this morning, she's very old, and I came to ask you to sit with her while I call a doctor. I'm afraid to leave her alone, we haven't got a phone. Please come with me."

Angie returned with her to the next-door apartment. The faded woman on the bed--Angie had never seen her before--looked up at her sideways with half-closed eyes. Faded--that was the word Angie thought of instantly, faded and shrivelled, and very, very old. Mrs. Kuller was about fifty-five years old; that meant the mother was at least seventy-five, but she looked much older than that.

"Stay. I'll be right back," said Mrs. Kuller. Angie sat down at the bedside, and waited. Could she become so withered as the old woman on the bed, she wondered. Yes, yes, of course--but so wrinkled? All of her seemed grey, her hands, her face, her hair. Her hair--there were pins in it--the woman had probably set it. Worrying about her

appearance at that age? Angie looked at her own reflection in the mirror, saw her skin firm, unlined, vivid-colored. She thought of her own mother, thought hard. No, Mamma could never get to look like the woman on the bed; Mamma might become even plumper as she aged, but never the opposite. The thinness of Mrs. Kuller's mother made Angie think of a knife creasing the bed lengthwise. There was something so unfamiliar about the room and the woman that Angie felt as if it were not quite real.

The grey, stiff lips spoke. "Glass water..." Angie went to the Kuller kitchen and turned on the cold water faucet. With her left hand, she reached out and killed, flat with her palm, a cockroach running up the back of the sink. With her right hand, she held a tumbler under the running stream of water until it had been rinsed several times. She filled it, and brought it to the woman on the bed, who took it without speaking.

"More?"

"No," the woman said. She dragged herself up into a sitting position and looked squarely at Angie. "I feel better," she said. "My daughter worries too much."

Strange, thought Angie, she looks less wrinkled now, as if the water were some kind of magic drink.

"You look better," she said.

The woman smiled. "My daugher gets too excited about nothing. That's how she lost her husband. She made him nervous, so he left her. They have a legal separation. We don't have divorces. They aren't good."

"Oh," said Angie. The woman continued, staring more fixedly at the girl. "Do you live next door?"

"Yes."

"Then you are the one who plays the piano?"

"Yes."

"It is so beautiful; I listen to it every morning. I've been living here for a few weeks. Every morning and every night I listen to the lovely piano. It reminds me of when I was young. My husband played the piano, you know. He drove an enormous truck, and in the evenings, he would play the piano, just for me. Lord knows I don't see where he got the strength to play after working so very, very hard all day, but he was a cultural person. So am I. My daughter does not take after us. My other children do. I have two sons and two daughters all together. My two sons are both in the Entertainment World. They are very prominent. You must have heard of them: Robert and Roger Tillman. They used to be acrobats. Now they do imitations. They're quite astonishing, really. I can close my eyes and see them perform. My dear, have you ever seen them?"

Angie had not seen them, but she did not wish to offend the old lady. "I think maybe I did see your sons. They're good-looking men, aren't they? Tall, and well-built?"

The woman on the bed smiled, whimsically. "You sweet child! You didn't want to hurt my feelings, did you? I'll tell you the truth. You couldn't possibly have seen them. They've been dead for fifteen years. They were on a tight-rope, without a net, and they both fell. They had been drinking. That's the truth. I only said they were alive now, and do imitations now, because that is precisely the way I enjoy thinking of them. I always hoped they would give up acrobatics, especially on tight-ropes. Oh, but they were such good boys! They always used to send me American Beauty Roses on Mother's Day. They never, never missed a year!"

"I like roses," said Angie, who did not.

"They are so beautiful," the woman continued, "so very beautiful! Now, my daughter Annie, the one who lives here, she only sends me a greeting card on Mother's Day. She's stingy."

"Maybe she hasn't any money," Annie suggested.

"Oh no, no, no, that isn't it. She's tight with her money. Believe me, I know. Why, that husband of hers sends her $150 every month! Every month, without fail. Lord knows I don't know where he gets the money. I think he takes numbers. He is friendly with racketeers."

"Oh," said Angie.

"Yes, racketeers. But I don't mind that. Joe Kuller is a good man, and I do wish my Annie would appreciate him. Do you know that in all the months I've been living here..."

"Months?"

"Yes, months. Did I say weeks before? How careless of me! In all these months, that daughter of mine has never once mentioned her husband! And he, poor devoted soul, he phones every week to ask her how she feels, and his check inevitably arrives promptly, on the third of the month, without fail! I always say that what a man does for a living is his own business, and I do wish my daughter would have the same sensible attitude."

"Maybe she just doesn't like him, Mrs. Tillman."

"Oh no, my dear child, don't call me Mrs. Tillman. I'm Mrs. Evans, Mrs. Richard Evans. I remarried after my first husband died. Richard and I were childhood sweethearts. Dear Richard! He waited for me all those long years. Herman--that's Herman Tillman--Herman came along and literally swept me off my feet! But he died. Richard is dead now, too, and all I have left is my children. That's why I'm

so anxious for a reconcilliation between my daughter and Joe Kuller. I always considered Joe a real son. My daughter has no right to keep me from having all my children!"

"No."

"I'm so glad you understand, my dear. So many young people find it difficult to be sympathetic. A young girl growing becomes so involved with herself that she hasn't any excess sympathy for older folk. But you are a dear, dear child. I can see that you're fine and intelligent. You play the piano, and so beautifully! You must have many men courting you!"

"Not too many."

"Oh? Then you have already made your choice? How lovely! Your young man is that dark, intelligent one, isn't that so? He's so refined."

"You know Tony?"

"Oh, is that his name? No,I have never seen him, but I'm sure he is exactly as I imagine him to be. I have heard his voice through the wall. These walls are very thin, you know. Tell me, my dear, does he pay attention to the tiny lit-tle things? The minor courtesies that make the wheels of life roll smoothly? Does he treat you as if you were an exquisite china doll? Such things are so important!"

"He holds doors open for me."

"See? I knew it! One can learn so much from only a voice. I've thought many times of going to the door and looking at him, but then I reconsider and realize it would not be polite. My dear, it is so very important to be polite. Roger and Robert, my sons, are always very polite. Whenever they escort me to the theater, they call for me in their automobile and bring flowers. They treat me as if I were their fiancé instead of their mother. Such lovely boys! They are in the Entertainment World, you know. They do imitations."

no strings for a reconciliation between my daughter and Joe Miller.
I always considered Joe a real son. My daughter has no right to keep
me from having all my children."

"No."

"I'm so glad you understand, my dear. So many young people find
it difficult to be sympathetic. A young girl growing become so
involved with herself that she hasn't any reason sympathy for older
folk. But you are a dear, dear child. I can see that you're fine and
intelligent. You play the piano, and so beautifully! You must have
many men courting you!"

"Not too many."

"Oh? Then you have already made your choice? How lovely! Your
young man is that dark, intelligent one, isn't that so? He's so
refined."

"You know Tony?"

"Oh, is that his name? No, I have never seen him. But I'm sure he
is exactly as I imagine him to be. I have heard his voice through
the wall. Those walls are very thin, you know. Tell me, my dear,
does he pay attention to the tiny lit-tle things? The minor courtesies
that make the wheels of life roll smoothly? Does he treat you as if
you were an exquisite china doll? Such things are so important."

"He holds doors open for me."

"Good! I knew it! One can learn so much from only a voice. I've
thought many times of going to the door and looking at him, but then I
reconsider and realize it would not be polite. My dear, it's so very
important to be polite. Roger and Sober, my sons, are always very
polite. Wherever they escort me to the theater, they call for me in
their automobile and bring flowers. They treat me as if I were their
fiancé instead of their mother. Such lovely boys! They are in the
entertainment World, you know. They do illustrations."

"Yes, you told me."

"Oh, my dear child! Am I repeating myself? I'm so sorry! Let me tell you about the act. Roger, he's the heavier one, Roger imitates Wallace Beery. Then Robert comes out looking like Jimmy Durante--he's the comedian with the long nose. They insult each other. I don't approve of that part at all, but I do realize that it is a necessity of the Entertainment World. You must remember, my child, that people do not mean what they say on the stage. You do understand, don't you?"

"Yes, Mrs. Evans."

"Now that I hear it voiced, it seems to me that I'm far more accustomed to being addressed as Mrs. Tillman. After all, I was Mrs. Tillman so much longer than I was Mrs. Evans. A name becomes part of one, don't you agree?"

"Yes."

"Now, about the act. After they insult each other, Roger--he weighs two hundred and ten pounds, with his shoes on--he imitates Fatty Arbuckle. I realize not many people nowadays know about Fatty Arbuckle--fame is so transient--but the old-timers appreciate it. I'm an old-timer, you know, although I feel quite young at times. One is as old as one feels, you know that, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Of course. Then, Robert--he's the younger one, Robert does bird-calls. Lord knows I don't know where he learned them. He's a city-boy, you know. But both of my sons appreciate nature. They learned that from their father. I always say that a cultural person begets cultural children. You go right on studying the piano. It will make a fine and upstanding woman of you. By this time, Roger is ready

for another imitation, and his next performance is very surprising. Everyone is so astonished! He turns his back to the audience and makes a few minor alterations to his costume and face. When he turns around again, he is Abraham Lincoln! Isn't that marvelous? If you think it's easy for a heavy man to imitate Abraham Lincoln, you're quite mistaken. Roger always receives a very heavy ovation for his Lincoln imitation. Wouldn't you applaud for something like that?"

"I think so."

"You think so? You should be quite positive, my dear. But perhaps Robert's imitation would please you more. Immediately after Lincoln, Roger leaves the stage for a few minutes. Robert, meanwhile, tells jokes to the audience, very humorous jokes, and then he turns his back and puts on a long nose. You should see it, it's such a masterpiece of a nose! You'd adore it! He imitates Pinocchio! My boys are so original! I'm always so proud of them, not only because they are my sons, but because they're wonderful men. Do you know, my child, that I never miss a performance? No matter what the day, no matter what I'm doing, and I'm quite the busy person, you know, I never, never would dream of missing a performance! No matter how many times I see the boys, it is never enough. They are so good, so very good!"

"They sound good," Angie agreed.

"Oh yes, yes! Well, my dear, one night, a few weeks ago, I asked my very dear friend Herbert to escort me. Not that I need an escort, you know. My sons are sufficient in that capacity. But Herbert is a very dear friend, and I believed he would enjoy the act immensely. And that is why I asked him to escort me."

"Who's Herbert?"

"Didn't I explain, child? Herbert is a very fine, refined, cultural gentleman. We met some years ago, but nothing could come of it.

I was married to Richard Evans at the time. But Herbert--dear, patient man!--Herbert waited until Richard died before paying court to me. We see each other quite often these days, quite often!"

"Are you going to marry him?" Angie asked.

"Heavens, no!" Herbert and I have discussed the situation thoroughly. Our decision is that we must wait until his daughters marry before we slip off quietly by ourselves and take our vows. His daughters are very beautiful, you know. His younger daughter, Elvira, will be a concert singer in a few years. Herbert has two daughters. Myra, the elder, is a teacher. You do see the pattern, do you not? Culture, you know. I have always been attracted to cultural men. Herbert is very refined."

Angie nodded. "He sounds that way."

The woman on the bed laughed uproariously. She laughed, shaking until her face seemed almost purple. "Oh, my dear child!" she cried. "You are very precious. I've never had such a good time in my life. I suppose you believe that Herbert really exists, Herbert and his two daughters."

"Don't they?"

"No, of course not! It is exactly the way it is with my two sons. I like to think of Herbert, just as I like to think that my two dear sons are still alive and on the stage, doing imitations, exactly as I described them. Child, I do think I should like to sleep now. Please do not be offended if I discontinue our conversation."

"I don't mind," Angie said. "Go to sleep if you want. I don't mind."

The woman closed her eyes before sliding down from her sitting position. Almost immediately, it seemed to Angie, she was asleep, as grey-faced as she had been when Angie had entered. Now, in the

silent room, the girl sat at the bedside and reflected on the confused life or dreams of the woman who lay sleeping.

Mrs. Kuller returned. Angie jumped up. "Did you get a doctor?" she asked.

"Yes. He'll be here in an hour."

"All right, Mrs. Kuller. I guess I can go now."

"Angie, that's your name, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"I'd like to thank you. B y the way, did my mother wake up at all?"

"Yes, she was awake most of the time you were out. She seemed all right, once she had a glass of water."

"Did she talk?"

"Yes."

"I suppose she told you she's been married four times?"

"No, twice. And she told me about your brothers, and a sister."

"I see. That's another version. Well, Angie, I don't want you repeating any of this, but I might as well tell you my mother has been married only once. My father died when I was sixteen. I was the only child, no others. I'm telling you this so you won't repeat anything to anyone. I want you to know the truth. Old people get themselves queer ideas sometimes. I wouldn't want anyone to know about this, but so long as she's already told you, it's better that I tell you the truth. I'm trusting you not to tell this to anybody. Give me your word."

"O.K. Mrs. Kuller. I give you my word. Only--don't worry about your mother--at least she makes up interesting stories."

"Theyre terrible! But I'm glad you don't think she's-well--crazy. Some of my friends have suggested that I put her away. I don't even

like the thought of it."

"Oh, no!"

"No, I wouldn't do anything like that. I've asked her to live with me, but she won't. She'll probably insist on going back to her own apartment soon as she gets over the attack. I haven't any control over her. She lives in a shoddy room-and-a-half, and I have to pay double rent. Well, Angie, thanks again."

"It's O.K. So long." Angie left. Back in her own bedroom, she dressed, and remembered she had been hungry. After breakfast, she found she could not practice the piano at all. She spent half the afternoon reading books she had read many times before; she spent the other half thinking about her own mother. No! Many things could happen to Mamma, but never that! Angie, by telling herself the same thing over and over again, managed to put the morning out of her mind, enough for her to devote the rest of the day to practicing the Chopin Preludes.

At five-thirty, she went for a walk, an uneventful, unadventurous walk, and returned home shortly afterward to think some more.

Mamma Tartrina was expected home at seven. Angie, at a quarter of the hour, suddenly became aware of her loneliness. She looked slowly around the apartment, seeing it freshly.

There was the kitchen, the flat-shaped kitchen, with the cracked linoleum, the broken ceiling, the unused icebox a few feet away from the window. There was the fire-escape on which food was stored in a tin bread-box, a box that was serving now as drum to the multiple sticks of the rain. There was a trunk in the corner of the room, housing unadapted clothing of other years. There were four chairs, and a piano-stool brought in from the living-room when five seats were needed.

Angie was observing everything now, eyes and nose working together. There was bacon-smell blending with the gasoline-odor from the corner garage. On the grey-white utility chest, there was a dish of warm, dust-flecked butter, rancid. Mamma had forgotten to throw it out. Angie looked and saw, and realized for the first time the shabbiness of her home. More than that, she thought of Mamma.

She sat down on the piano-stool and continued to survey the room. There was the table, off-balance, with a cracked little bakelite radio, squat down cat-a-corner, its cord ivying snugly along the wall to its socket. The radio, Angie thought, was reassuring because there was music in it. There were tone-poems, symphonies, concertos, and once in a while, there were blues...

Before her thoughts could go any further, Mamma came home, heavy and bustling. She saw Angie and grinned so broadly that her two dimples appeared, for the first time in weeks. Angie jumped up and kissed her, something she had not done for years.

"Chè cosa!" Mamma exclaimed. "Now you know already the good thing that happen today? Is magic? Tell me how you know."

"What good thing?"

"You no know? Then why you come kiss me like special big thing happen? You maybe feel like something good happen?"

"No, Mamma, I just felt like jumping up, that's all."

"Oh. So now I tell you the good thing. Angelina mia, today I tell my bossa that I no work no more unless he make me foreman-lady when Minna leave to marry her Billie. She go leave next week. So bossa he say, "Mrs. Tartrina, I like you work. You plenty good. Maybe I consider you for job of foreman. Maybe, you see."

"That's swell, Mamma!"

"Angelina, what means consider?"

"It means to think about something. Anything else happen?"

"Anything else, you ask! What happen! Tonight, just before I take off apron and make ready to go home, the bossa he come in and talk to me. So, Angelina, now look on foreman-lady of Blakestone's Mills, third floor department! He tell me all over again how I work good and they think high of me. He tell me there no one is who better for the job. I get raise too, me, you Mamma!"

"That's really sweet! Swell, Mamma! Oh, by the way, I have to ask you something."

"Che? What you think about?"

"The lady next door. Her mother's sick. I saw her this morning."

Mamma started to change her clothes. With her dress halfway over her head, she asked, "What lady you mean?"

"You know, Mamma--Mrs. Kuller. The one who bangs on the wall when I play the piano at night. Her mother is sick, had a heart attack."

"Is very bad heart?"

"No. She seems to have gotten over it. But, gee, Mamma--she looked sort of--you should have seen her--she was so skinny and old-looking. I felt sorry for her. Then she woke up and got well quick like magic. She started talking."

Mamma buttoned her housedress, smoothing the front of it as she went along. "Aha!" she said. "Now I know who you mean. Mrs. Kuller's mamma--she little bit crazy. She walk in street sometimes and talk to trees, tell them stories about how she have five husbands. Real pazzo, crazy in head. I know who you mean."

"No," Angie protested. "She isn't as bad as that. She does make up stories, but I don't think she'd do something like that, go around talking to trees. Did you ever see her?"

"Si! One morning, I go to work and there she is in park on bench looking at tree and telling things to tree. No one there in park where she is except tree, and more trees. You tell me that not crazy?"

"ButMamma, you're sure it was the same woman? It might have been someone else, couldn't it?"

"No. Was Mrs. Kuller's mamma. I real sure. Now I go make supper."

Angie sat down on the sofa, with her feet on the pillows. She thought about the morning. She wondered if she'd ever stop thinking about it. The more she thought about it, the more depressed she became, and the more bewildered. The old woman's stories were so fascinating--how could she have anything wrong with her head? Also, s he was clear. If she changed a story, she was careful to explain the change. That wasn't being crazy, was it? If someone were really mixed up, he'd tell one thing on top of another, and not bother to tie up the facts. Maybe there were all kinds of ways of being mixed-up? Angie picked at her cuticle, and grew more pensive.

Mamma returned. "Angelina mia, why you look so sad? You look like all the life in you is sleeping while you sit on couch like somebody asleep who isn't real asleep. Come, we eat supper now. I make soup. Is good soup. I no put garlic in it. My Angelina say she no like garlic so I leave garlic out. See? I want my Angie to be happy, so she be good, like soup--only in Angie I no want to see garlic taken out, and pepper and salt. My Angelina be plenty flat soup if she not these things in her. Come, bambina, you think too much today. Better you stop now."

Angie smiled, rising. "But Mamma, I never saw anyone like that before. I can't help it if I think about it. It's sort of sad,

that's all. Besides, I guess I got to thinking about getting old. I guess I never realized before how old somebody gets when they get old. It's going to happen to me, someday."

Mamma was not fooled. "What you telling me, bambina? You no thinking about youself. You think maybe I get old someday, so now you start acting like I gonna die tomorrow. That why you come kiss me like big celebration. You no fool you old Mamma. She too smart!"

"That wasn't it, Mamma."

Mamma folded all her bulk in her arms, and laughed, happily. "You really growing up, piccolina. You even say nice things once in a while. Now, come, no more talk like this, no more. Is late--and we go eat."

Marching to the kitchen as she spoke the last few words, she beckoned Angie to follow. Angie obeyed, lethargically. In the kitchen, she brightened as she watched Mamma expertly pouring soup from pot to bowls.

Mamma sighed. "Even soup would be better with garlic in, not out," she said, and ate her first spoonful.

9.

It was Saturday afternoon. Lawton was preparing to leave the office for the day. He removed the papers from his desk, tossing them haphazardly into the top drawer. He clipped his pen and pencil into his coat pocket, and straightened his tie, wishing he could remove it.

On such a lonely day, in a lonely, empty office with blinds drawn and windows closed, lonely office with the girls gone home and the telephone silent, there was only the clatter of an ice truck in the street to remind Lawton tha people moved and breathed, outside.

Sandy was moving and breathing somewhere, wasn't she, but her steps weren't leading her toward him, and her breaths were not drawn in between words addressed to him. But he could speak to her, couldn't he, if he phoned? She might be home, in a receptive mood, in a friendly one, mightn't she? It was a little matter of taking a chance; his luck wasn't always bad, was it? Besides, if this roommate of hers--Joan? Jean?--answered the phone, he wouldn't leave his name. There would be no harm done, no harm at all. The office was empty; there was no one to hear him no matter what he might say. He had never before tried phoning her from the office. It might be better this way. In a phone booth, he felt as if he were standing in a vertical tomb, sealed even more tightly by his fear of what Sandy might say. At home, when he phoned, he grew morose,, and hours later, when he lay in his bed, he found sleep impossible. He had used exactly five sleeping tablets in the course of three weeks; each one had been taken after an unsuccessful telephone call to Sandy. The office might be better. There was something impersonal about the atmosphere. If Sandy were not home, he could pretend he had made a business call. If it were a

business call, and no one answered, he would think nothing of it. He would pretend--and if Sandy were not home, he would shrug it off.

But it was Saturday! Could he in his right mind ask to see her at night? Wouldn't she laugh at him, or ask him why he didn't have an important appointment with someone else that evening? Saturday nights were important nights for him, and Sandy knew it. One carefully-spent Saturday night in the home of the proper Jupiter would mean a restful week following. A good Saturday night--with the right contact--meant a relief of strain on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, perhaps longer.

He dialed Sandy's number and hung up on the first ring.

He went to the washroom, smoked a cigarette and forgot to wash. Five minutes later, hat in hand, he turned the key to the door.

His car seemed lazy; Lawton wondered if there was anything wrong with it, and decided it was his imagination. After all, it was a very hot day. Perhaps he was blaming his own lethargic driving on the car. He drove seven blocks and parked outside a luncheonette. He was parched; it wouldn't hurt to have a cold drink.

"What'll you have?"

"Orangeade. No--make it a chocolate malted instead."

He lit a cigarette and waited, uncomfortably aware that he was stalling. The sooner he downed the malted, the sooner he would have to return to his car and drive home. The sooner he arrived home, the sooner he would have to face the fact that he had absolutely nothing to do and no one to see until Monday morning. True, things didn't happen this way often, but when they did, he felt them severely. In short, he was lonely.

The hot street with it dusty and immobile air was a cruel, blunt

contrast to the air-cooled luncheonette. Across the street, a park appeared temptingly green. No one would see him, he reasoned, if he sat on a bench for a while? It would be a terrible joke if someone he knew saw him sitting on a bench on a Saturday afternoon, like an old fogey. He could visualize it clearly, painfully. "Poor Lawton!" someone would say. "He goes around acting like a big-shot with a million friends, and do you know what? I saw him sitting all by himself on a park bench the other day. He must lead a miserable life outside the office."

Wasn't he being illogical, he wondered. After all, he knew no one in the neighborhood. No one could possibly see him. At any rate, he didn't intend to ist on the bench all day, if he did sit down. He only wanted to cool off for a while. Hell, even the President of the United States has to cool off once in a while!

He should have gone away for the weekend. Then, he would have entered the office Friday morning wearing a sprightly air and his favorite lightweight suit. Friday evening, when he would leave, a bit earlier than usual, everyone would notice his suitcase, and tell him to have a good time. It would have been no trouble to have gotten Saturday morning off. Actually, the morning had been wasted. Three phone-calls had been made, and one letter dictated--all that could have been done Monday morning.

If he did go into the park, he would have to go in, really deep in. It wouldn't do for him to be seen on a bench, facing the street. Someone might drive past and see him, and that would do it. Office gossip was merciless. Lawton wanted gossip about him to be the speculative kind that wondered about his mysterious, glamorous private life. An aura of glamour was somewhat theoretical, he admitted to

himself, but it created a comfortable working asset. "Never can tell when your friends'll c ome in handy, Al!"

So where were his friends? That was easy to answer: Most of them were away for the Summer. It was hot; no one could blame them for escaping from the city. So there were only a handful of dinner invitations, with long weeks passing between each one.

The bench seemed perfectly located. The park was quiet, except for the sound of children playing on the lawn which was separated from Al by a row of full-leaved trees. Occasionally, someone would walk past, an old man carrying newspapers, a young woman in search of her children, or an adolescent hand-in-hand couple. No one looked at Al, even cursorily. Feeling safe, he loosened his collar and removed his jacket.

He wished he had brought his newspaper. He was not one to spend much time perusing trees and lawns. He might, he thought, walk down to the lake and watch the rowboats, but there was more chance of being seen there. He pulled out his wallet, and methodically began to read all the clippings and scraps of paper he could find. If he only had a desk, he mused, he could probably do a full day's work in a few hours here in the park.

"Hello, Mr. Lawton!"

He looked up, startled. Angie was standing directly in front of him, smiling and obviously surprised.

"Hello, there!" he answered. "I'm stealing a little time for cooling off. It was so hellish hot in the office this morning, and I'm going to a stuffy party this evening. The park seemed cool, so I dropped in for a while."

Angie sat down next to him, carefully pulling her light cotton-print skirt down over her knees. She did not remember why she had decided to wear a skirt instead of slacks for a mere walk, but she was glad that her slacks were home in the closet. Also, her hair was combed.

"I like it here," she said, quietly, sniffing the non-existent breeze.

"Yes, it's pleasant," he answered.

"Do you know what I started out to do, today?" Angie asked. "I was going to go rowing, and I brought along a book to read. I can read it on the bench here if I'm not disturbing you."

"No, of course not. I hope I'm not disturbing you, young lady."

Angie opened her book and tried to read. Lawton watched her out of the corner of his eye. He was less uneasy now that she was here. He looked as if he were with someone, and that was better than appearing to be all alone on a bench, like a worn-out lonely man. She looked, he admitted to himself, quite the young lady. She looked somewhat like him, he observed--black hair, dark complexion, lean face. But her eyes were blue and his were hazel. One quick impression, though, and someone might take her for his kid sister. He felt himself relaxing. He removed his tie, folded it and slid it into his coat pocket. He smiled at Angie. "I'm going to cool off even more," he said, and rolled up his shirtsleeves.

Angie had never seen him without his jacket. Now, she stared frankly, and appraised his appearance. "I like you that way, Mr. Lawton--you look very young and healthy."

"So do you, Angie," he laughed. "It suddenly occurs to me that I'd like very much to go rowing. Would you mind having a passenger? -- Or better still, I'll do the rowing."

"You?"

"Certainly. Don't you think I know how to row?"

"Well, sure--but I just didn't think you'd like that sort of thing. I mean, you're a businessman and all that."

The "all that" meant multitudes, and Lawton recognized it. He strove to put the girl at ease. True, in the few times he had encountered her, he had tried to give her the same impression of him that he gave to his office girls, but this afternoon, this hot, lush afternoon, he would pretend she was his kid sister.

"Angie," he said, "do you know we have similar skin colorings?"

His statement gave Angie a peculiar stomach-thrill. "Do you think so?" she asked, looking at him appraisingly. "Yes," she agreed. "Dark hair, darkish skin, different-colored eyes...let me see your hand."

He extended it, smiling. She turned it around , and perused the palm. She reached out a timid finger and traced the lifeline. It was the lifeline, she was certain. It was all she remembered of an article on palmistry she had once read. She decided that in the future, she would try to read all miscellaneous articles. One could never tell when they might come in handy. Now, for example, if she knew palmistry, she could go on holding Lawton's hand indefinitely.

"That's the lifeline," she told Lawton. "You're going to have a long life. It's all I know about reading palms." She released his hand abruptly. "Do you know anything about it?"

"No," he answered,with finality. "I think it's a racket. You know, palmists are outlawed in New York."

"Why?"

"They're considered frauds, and they are. Why analyze lines on a

palm? One might as well count the hairs on an arm. It doesn't seem logical to me that creases on a palm reveal anything, at least no more than coloring or hair-distribution."

"Well, it's fun, though, and maybe it does mean something."

"It seems unlikely."

"But, Mr. Lawton, doesn't it seem possible that God took time out to draw a map of each man's life on his palm?"

"Not very."

"I read an article--"

"That doesn't prove anything. If a thing is in print, it doesn't necessarily mean it's true."

"I guess not."

"Lawton stood up. "Still want to go rowing?"

"Yes."

"My offer holds. I'd like to do the rowing, and you can take it easy."

"But you don't have to go someplace today?"

"Yes, yes, of course, but not until later. I've a little time now."

"Swell. I'll show you where the boathouse is. I guess you haven't been in this park much."

That was pleasing to Lawton. Now, here was a girl who instinctively understood him, knowing without being told that someone as busy and popular as he usually was would not have much time to spend sitting on a park bench. He did not have to explain too much to her. She accepted him exactly as he presented himself. Really, she would make an admirable kid sister...

Angie trotted beside him, stealing peeks at his profile whenever she thought he wouldn't notice. How wonderful! She was walking in the park

with Mr. Lawton. They would go rowing. It was already agreed. That meant at least another hour of being with him; boats were contracted for a minimum of one hour. Also, if he were an inexpert rower, he would probably be unable to gauge his time accurately. He would probably take them far out on the lake and discover ten minutes before the hour was up that he had not allowed himself enough time for returning. That had happened with Tony once. It could happen to anyone who didn't know the lake's deceptive size.

She might even consider it as spending the entire afternoon with Mr. Lawton!

They reached a fork in the path. "Which way now?" asked Lawton. He shifted his jacket to his left arm.

"We turn right."

The boat house came into view, its red bricks baking in the sun. "I see it now," Lawton said, "over there." He looked at the water, longingly. "Shall we take the boat out for two hours?"

"Two?" Angie asked, in excited amazement.

Lawton reconsidered. "I guess not," he said. "I probably can't spare more than an hour anyway."

"Oh." It was short and disappointed. Then, Angie brightened, forcedly. "Here we are!" she said.

"Yes," agreed Lawton, who went to the ticket-man and made the necessary arrangements.

The lake was not crowded, for which Lawton was grateful. In truth, he had not handled a rowboat for at least ten years. Now, he managed his oars gracefully, encountering no obstacles except a tangled, diseased-looking little island of water-lillies. The coolness was pleasing. The breeze he created lapped across his face, and he was young and strong, and armed with muscles. His shirttails, wearied of their confinement, crawled out beyond the guard of his belt. His

trouser-cuffs dragged the mud and dust of the grey, aged, grimy boat bottom. He did not care.

"Shall I roll them up for you?" asked Angie, pointing to the trouser-cuffs. "They're getting dirty."

"It's an old suit, not important. I can have it cleaned."

"But it might keep you cooler."

"All right then."

She bent forward carefully, and turned up the cuffs, once, twice, three times...

"Hey, wait--young lady--my legs aren't pretty enough to show off."

"No?" Angie asked, stopping abruptly. She looked at him quizzically, and he grinned down at her. The breeze strengthened.

"Your book is getting wet," Lawton observed, pointing with his chin to the volume of poetry on the seat beside Angie.

She nodded, and lay the book on her lap.

Ah, he thought, how traditional. Young girl in a rowboat, with a book on her lap, sighing demurely while a rugged-muscled man maneuvers a boat with ease. How simple life could be, he thought, how very simple! He might--that was a laugh--call up Sandy sometime and ask her to go rowing. He smiled at himself. Angie, assuming the smile was for her, answered it happily.

He wondered if he should continue to make conversation.

"Care to read aloud, Angie?"

"Not particularly. I only brought the book along because I thought I'd be alone. When I get out to the center of the lake, I usually stop rowing, and read. But I have you to talk to, so I don't have to read."

"But I didn't intend to interfere with any of your plans, Angie. After all, I'm only here by my own invitation."

"Oh, no! I wanted you to come along, but I was afraid to ask you. You're so busy. When I saw you on the bench, I knew you were only stopping for a few minutes."

"Yes, that was it. But it's such a hot day. We all have to interrupt our plans once in a while, you understand."

"Sure."

He knew she understood. There was no skepticism in her voice, only non-concealed admiration. Why didn't females retain their young qualities always? Why did they have togrow up to be cynics? The years would pass; ten years from now, she would probably see right through him, the same way Sandy did. She would know that if he were really busy, he wouldn't even consider taking an afternoon off to spend in company with a pair of oars. But now she was young, and he felt himself wise and protective. He would not interfere with any of her own plans, he decided.

"If the sun isn't in your eyes, why don't you read aloud for a while?"

"It won't bother you?"

"Certainly not. I like poetry."

"What kind?"

"All kinds. You just flip through the pages and read whatever strikes you."

"All right."

She opened the book, aware of herself and her companion, feeling the sun on her face, hearing the plash of the water, the whir of the oars, aware of the clean goodness of her healthy body and the perspiration on her brow and back, feeling the soft, almost unapproachable loveliness of the afternoon. She was melting inside, and the elevators in her stomach were rushing to her head. She must read something quaint, without the

word love in it. She must choose wisely, or the elevators would rush up and out of her head, and Lawton would see them.

"Read anything you want," he urged.

She closed her eyes, opened the book, and thrust her finger, like an arrow, toward an unseen target. She would read it, no matter what it was--

"I arise from dreams of thee
In the first sweet sleep of night,
When the winds are breathing low,
And the stars are shining bright;
I arise from dreams of thee,
And a spirit in my feet
Hath led me--who knows how!.
To thy chamber window, Sweet!"

Lawton listened, trying not to smile. He had watched her gambler's way of choosing the poem. It was an accidental choice, and he would be a tactless man if he commented on the strongly romantic quality of the poem. He did not know much about young girls, he realized. He wondered what she was thinking. There she was, sitting there, reading, glowing, her voice a bit naïve but full of conviction. She stumbled on the word thee, and the way she pronounced Sweet almost soured it, except that she looked up at him, self-consciously as she said it, and that provided the necessary softness. She finished, closing the book, and looking away very busily out onto the lake. Lawton followed her gaze and saw nothing.

"Why don't you read some more?" he asked. "I said I didn't intend to interfere with your plans."

"Do you want me to read?"

"Certainly."

She would lose herself in a long poem, she decided. She would read it, and keep her eyes on the page, and not look up no matter what the words were, no matter how urgent her need to know what the man who sat

before her was thinking. Nothing would keep her from plodding on, word after word, semicolon after semicolon. There was safety in the pages, safety that might call her strange feelings to halt. Her head was zooming with the relentless verticalities of the elevators in her stomach. They would not stop, she knew, until she was home again, safe and alone in an armchair. Then the afternoon would happen all over again. She would remember it, she thought, for the rest of her life, every detail, every exchanged word, the whiteness of Lawton's shirt, his sad smile, his fists around the oar-handles, everything, even the way she felt, elevators and all. Experiences could be like this, she knew, suddenly. They could be like packages, taped and roped, private beyond privacy, to be opened only by herself. Their bonds would fray from repeated handling, but the packages would be intact, miraculously, forever and always.

She was afraid to speak.

"Perhaps the sun is too strong for your eyes, Angie, " Lawton said. "I don't want to talk you into eyestrain."

"No, the sun is all right. I was just looking for a good poem to read. The last one was sort of gooey."

"Some of the best poems in the world are 'gooey' as you say. Back in my bookselling days, volumes of love poetry sold as quickly as I could buy them. For turnovers, they ranked next to outright erotology."

"Oh." (What was erotology? She would pretend to know, and then go home and look it up in the dictionary.) "Mr. Lawton," she continued, "tell me if there's something special you want me to read."

He thought about it, rolling back the years until he found himself in a high school classroom, taking an examination. He had had to match two columns. One had the names of poems, and one had the authors' names. There was something about a beach, he recalled, and it was tied up

with Matthew Arnold. The name of the beach? There were straits with the same name, but that did him no good. Well, he could suggest another poem. He thought about that, too, and realized that he knew the names of books of verses, but not the names of individual poems. The beach idea was a lead.

"I'm thinking of something, Angie. I'll have it in a minute."

"Sure," she answered, idly turning pages.

"Dover Beach!" he said, grinning.

"Oh, I like that!" Angie said, and looked in the index for the page number. Her impulse was to flip through the pages on an informal search, but Lawtonwas watching her.

She read:

"The sea is calm tonight,
The tide is full, the moon lies fair
Upon the straits--on the French coast the light
Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,
Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay..."

Halfway down, she paused, peeking at the immobile face of Lawton. She took a breath, and finished quickly:

"And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night."

"That's rather good," Lawton commented. Would you mind reading part of it again? The part about Sophocles hearing it on the Ægean?"

"Of course."

"Sophocles long ago
Heard it on the AEgean, and it brought
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
Of human misery..."

Angie felt, rather than knew what turbid meant. She would look that up in the dictionary, too, along with erotology.

"Was that the part you meant?"

"Yes, that was it."

"You know something, Mr. Lawton? I think I understand the poem better now."

"Perhaps it's because you're relaxed now. I remember when I was selling books, I used to get complaints all the time from students who didn't like to be told what poems to read. I used to argue them out of it, because I felt they didn't appreciate the education they were getting."

"What college did you go to, Mr. Lawton?"

"I only went to high school. I've regretted it. Let's see--you've just been graduated from high school, haven't you? The night I was --drunk--you had gone to a graduation party; you told me about it afterwards. You and that boy Tony were on your way home from the party when you met me. Remember?"

Could she possibly forget? "Yes, I remember. It was a terrible party. Tony didn't know how to dance, he still doesn't, and I didn't spend any time at all with him all evening. That's why we left a bit early. He wanted us to go somewhere and have coffee, because he said he wanted to talk to me and there was too much noise at the party."

"Now I understand!" Lawton said.

"Understand what?"

"I thought he seemed annoyed the next time I saw him. He appeared angry at me for some mysterious reason. At first, I assumed he didn't feel well. You remember--the time I was having a quick dinner at that dirty little restaurant near my office. Tony didn't say much. Scowled quite a bit. He seemed almost dyspeptic. I guess the lad dislikes me."

"Oh, no!"

"How do you know?"

"He never says anything at all bad about you. Tony likes everyone,

almost."

"I wouldn't know. He seems like a bright young man."

"He is. He had the highest average in school when we graduated. He's going to college in the fall. He was given a scholarship, but he turned it down because his father has money and Tony didn't feel it was fair to take the scholarship away from someone who needed it more than he did."

"What are you going to do in the fall, Angie?"

"Honest, I don't know."

"Any chance of you going to college?"

"I don't think we can afford it. My father is dead and my mother works. I'm seventeen, and I sort of think I should be self-supporting. Besides, I'd rather go to Music School. I play the piano--I think I told you once."

"No you didn't. I'd like to hear you play sometimes."

"I should have invited you to the graduation to hear my solo."

"Sorry I missed it."

Angie did not answer. She had just realized that by holding her hand up to her face, her cuticle was in full sight of Lawton. Now, she was trying to hide it. She put her hand on her lap, under the book. Lawton saw, and said nothing.

"Why don't you stop for a while?" Angie asked. "Let me row, OK?"

"No," Lawton answered. "I'd rather you didn't row. I'll stop, and we'll drift."

He pulled the oars toward him, and let them rest on the boat-bottom. Then, he leaned back and lit a cigarette.

They drifted, slowly, gently toward one of the tree-lined little plots of earth called islands by the cityites who had never seen real ones. The boat wafted with seeming deliberacy toward the coolest

part of the shore, a water-area shaded by the arched foliage of an elderly weeping willow. The boat sought its place of rest, found it, and ceased to drift, almost as if a hand had plunged an anchor into the shallow lakebottom. Without leaving its post, the boat rocked, softly, rhythmically, and cooled itself.

"Good spot," Lawton commented.

"Yes," Angie agreed. "There's nobody on the island, and it looks so restful--cool and quiet. I wish I could build a house on it."

"It would have to be a bungalow. There isn't enough room for a house, and if you did try to build a house, there wouldn't be any room for the trees, and then the island wouldn't be cool anymore."

"Well, a little house, then. A bungalow, or even a shack. Do you think the city would charge a lot of money for the land?"

"No. They just wouldn't sell it."

"OK., no house."

"Angie?"

"Yes, Mr. Lawton?"

"I wish you wouldn't call me 'Mr. Lawton'. My first name's Al."

"Can I call you by your first name?"

"Certainly. I don't call you 'Miss Tartrina', do I?"

"No."

"All right then, my name is Al."

"O.K., Al, what were you going to say?"

"I was about to suggest that we change places for about ten minutes. My seat is directly in the shade, and yours has too much sun on it. You might be far more comfortable here."

"No, it's all right."

She looked up at the island; it seemed to invite her. If it were Tony with her, not Lawton, Al, she would have scrambled ashore, expecting

him to follow. But her companion was Lawton, Al, and such action would not be polite. She might suggest it, though--

"Mr. Lawton--"

"Al!"

"Al--do you think we could get together and drag the boat up onto the land, and get out for a little while? It's sort of nice on the island, unless maybe you don't want to get your suit dirty. I don't see any benches, so we'd probably have to sit on the grass."

"That's all right, Angie. Let me get out first,so I can help you."

First, he tossed his jacket onto the grass, and threw Angie's book after it, carefully. Then, holding an overhanging branch, he climbed ashore, and reached his hand out to Angie. "Watch your step!"

"Thanks," she said, when she stood beside him. Lawton dropped her hand, and went after the rowboat. He dragged it toward him, until half of it lay on the shore. "I think it will be safe here," he said. "We'll have to keep an eye on it."

"Oh sure," Angie agreed. "I've been on this island before." She found a shaded plot of grass, and sat down on it, careful to do it as gracefully as she could. It was not easy. Habits of long-standing were hard to change. When Lawton said "Angie" in the middle of her self-seating process, she forgot to take care, and flopped down, as was her custom.

"Angie, are you wearing a wristwatch?"

"No. Haven't you got one?"

"I left it in the office, probably in the washroom. I take it off when I wash."

"When did you notice it was missing?"

"About a half-minute ago."

"I haven't a watch."

Startled, she thrust her head forward. "How will we know when to go back?"

"I'm sure I don't know," Lawton answered, dropping down beside her. He lit another cigarette. The pack, he saw, had three cigarettes left in it.

"I have it," he said.

"What do you have?"

"I know how we can tell time. I smoke a cigarette approximately every twenty minutes. Now, the next cigarette I light will mean we've been here twenty minutes. We'll remain here until my next impulse to smoke. All right?"

"Fine!" Angie said. "Only I don't think it's such a good way to judge time."

"Why?"

"Because you'll be self-conscious about smoking, and when you start to smoke again, you won't be really sure it's twenty minutes. Before this, you must have done it automatically, and without thinking about it."

"You have a point there."

"Yes."

Angie kept her gaze iron-bound to the lake. She was afraid to turn and look at Lawton. If, when she looked at him, he also turned his head, their faces would be very close. So then, she sat there rigidly, thinking of things to say.

"It's nice here, Mr. Lawton. Thanks for bringing me."

"Al."

"Al."

He rolled up his sleeves, and turned on his side, propping his elbow on the grass. "I'm enjoying it, too," he said. "To be truthful, I haven't relaxed like this for a very long time. Too long."

"What do you usually do to relax, Mr. Lawton, Al?"

"Go to a party. But that isn't very restful. It's a marathon of talk, drink and smoke."

Angie looked the other way. "How is your girl friend?" she asked, with elevators in her ears.

"Which girl friend?" Lawton asked, carefully.

"The one whose picture is in your wallet. I saw it when I was looking for your address the night Tony and I found you in the car."

Sandy, she meant Sandy, Lawton knew at once. It hurt, it hurt terribly but he wouldn't let it bother him. Why should he be disturbed because Sandy's name was mentioned in this dirt-spot of comparative peace? Because Sandy should be here beside him? Whose fault was it that she wasn't? Oh, Lord God, he was ashamed of himself! A man his age, an adult, a mature human being, and he feared a telephone! He couldn't even use the excuse that he was afraid of discovering she was married. She had a roommate, didn't she--someone named Jean or Joan?

Damn it to hell! He would phone Sandy as soon as he left the park. That was a promise! If he didn't keep promises to himself, who would? Who, in this conniving, tricking, pushing world? He had always kept promises to himself. What kind of senile routine was this phone business? Think of it! The mere mention of a name--and this sick, thrusting feeling. No two ways about it, he must never allow himself to become soft, because he was vulnerable, with a thousand heels of Achilles. He would be hard. He would make jokes. He would be Surface Lawton. He would let down no barriers, never let them down. This was insane, juvenile, insipid.

It was ridiculous, he knew, but he had to look at Sandy's picture. He took out his wallet, and looked at the face for a second, careful to keep his own face immobile.

"Is this the picture you saw?" he asked Angie because she was staring at him curiously.

She took it. "Yes, this is it. She's pretty."

"Very."

"Are you going to marry her?"

He put the wallet back in his pocket, somewhat abruptly, and forced himself to laugh. "No, Angie," he said. Then, after a moment, "I'm going to wait for you to grow up."

She turned away then, quickly, because for some strange reason her eyes had filled with tears, and if Lawton, Al, were to see her face, he'd know immediately the why and wherefor of her crying. She turned away and stroked the crew-cut grass with her hot, perspiring hand. How, she wondered, amid her watering eyes, how did anyone find time to come out to this island and bother about cutting the grass? She would think about it and find an answer, and while she sought one, her eyes would clear. She tried, but it did not help. Who cared about the grass, except that it was there, and pleasant to the touch? Who cared about the grass except that it was part of this miserable, beautiful today? Maybe the sky cared, and the earth, and the trees, but she didn't, no, she didn't, not while Lawton could sit there and say jokingly that he would wait for her to grow up. But it wasn't only that--it was today, all of it, from the first moment the sunlight had ignored the dust of the window-pane, and had come calling, saying it was morning. From then until this very second, the day had been at once magic and tender; it hurt and it was lovely, and it was like playing Schumann for the first time.

Lawton, unaware of her, found and lit a cigarette. "Angie," he said, watching the rowboat, "perhaps we should be getting back. I've had my second impulse to smoke."

"In a minute," she mumbled.

He heard the strangeness of her choked voice and turned to look at her. She continued to look away.

"Angie? Anything wrong?"he asked.

"No," she said, in a nasal gasp.

He turned her head around, looked, saw, and forgot that he was Would-Be-Tycoon Lawton, Autocrat of the Desks, Friend to the Merchant Princes. All he could remember was that he had strong shoulders, and women cry on shoulders, and that applied to all women, except perhaps Sandy, but now he wasn't even sure of that.

He put his arm around her, letting her bury her head somewhere between his shoulder and his chest, letting her take sanctuary while he stroked her black, smooth, sun-warmed hair. She shivered slightly, almost imperceptibly, and he went on stroking, his fingers greeted by the vibrant, rich hair, greeted and accepted. He bent, and kissed her ear, and muttered words into it, soft, traditional, consoling words she could not hear, but only feel.

It was summer and Schumann, the sun and the grass, and his shirt at Angie's nostrils was tobacco shops and laundries, and if she let tears stain it, it would smell of the lake and of her, and the dust on her window-panes, and the pages of a book of poetry, and it would never go away, the smell, even if she never saw him again, even if the shirt was washed a million times and hung to dry in a room where Angie would never walk.

The shirt was hers, and the shoulder was hers, and the day was hers, and the island was theirs, and the hand was hers, the hand that moved on the back of her head, drawing the elevators toward it. And when the elevators rushed toward it, flying, the hand may not have known, but Angie did, and would remember.

Then, abruptly, there was cessation, not of the mood, but of the music and the tears. Angie turned away. "I feel better now," she said.

Lawton started to smile, then stopped. "You funny little kid," he said. "What was it?"

"Nothing. A mood maybe, sudden, sort of, and it was all sad and beautiful."

"And it made you cry?"

"Yes. Just a mood."

He stood up, and then reached out to help her up. She looked at him queerly. "You're a funny kid," he said, again, and putting his arms around her, he kissed her, lightly, on the cheek.

In the rowboat, he said, "I wish you were my kid sister." She heard it, and it wasn't bad at all, because kid sisters were there, and you had to accept them because they were part of your life. They could cry once in a while, and laugh sometimes, and be assured that shoulders would pillow their heads. Kid sisters could have eyes that looked in admiration and feared no criticism; they could have cheeks that were kissed once in a while.

Angie looked at Lawton, and smiled, and knew that it was all right that she was still crying a little bit inside of her, but it didn't show, and it was beautiful, even if she couldn't hold it in her hands, even if she couldn't say this is mine. It was hers, sad and wonderful, and

it was still like playing Schuman for the first time on a yielding, singing piano.

10.

(ITALICS)

Sunday afternoon. Mamma gone to church. Sunday afternoon. Mamma gone to church. Sunlight through the curtains. The curtains need a washing. Cracks in the ceiling, and so what?

Nothing to do. Nothing to do but sit and dream andrecall and remember and dream some more.

The island. Windless wonder, wonderful, wonderful, wonderful, more wonderful, most wonderful, wonderful, wonderfuller, wonderfullest.

Lawton wore dark green socks, very neat, tight to the ankles and higher. Lawton, Mr. Lawton, Al. You couldn't see higher than then the ankles, but you knew they were tight. Lawton was neat, but when he took his jacket off, when he rowed, his shirt came sliding up out of his belt, and he looked tousled and it was pleasant to see. First shaggy, then neat again, shaggy and neat all in one man, and even the hair got out of place when he rowed. The hair--it had sweated, little half-drops of damp that grew and grew and rolled down his long forehead. Some drops rolled down his face, curving to his temples, rolling down to his cheeks, riding past his eyes, down, more down, dropping on his collar.

What had he said? All of it, word after word--don't you remember all of it, every word? He had said "You're a funny kid," and he had put his arms around you. That had been the last thing he had said before putting his arms around you. "You're a funny kid," he had said, but he had not meant funny any way but the right way. And the perspiration had been on his face, and on your face, and the moisture met when he had kissed your cheek. You wouldn't dry it off, not even

when you got home and had to eat supper and talk to Mamma about Blakestone's Mills. Later, when the perspiration had dried away, you were mournful because the only thing in the world that had been his and yours belonged to you no longer. It was part of the air, and the air didn't care, not the way you did. Nobody could care, nobody, nothing, not the way you did.

Would it ever happen again? No, magic doesn't happen twice, and if it doesn't and can't, will it be all right with you? Was yesterday enough? Sure, yes, certainly--enough and more and better than nothing, and even in your best imaginings, it hadn't happened that way.

You were wrong about the perspiration being the only thing that belonged to the two of you. There was something else. There was a poem, "Dover Beach." He had liked it, had asked you to read it again. Did you read it well enough? Should you practice reading it aloud in case there was a next time? Would he ask to hear it again? Would he think of you the next time he reads it to himself? Does he read it to himself? If not, would he ever remember any of the lines? You are going to memorize it so it will be all yours, and maybe part of the lake will be yours with it, and the water and the island and the trees and the grass, and his dark face, and the shine of the damp on his cheek.

The poem, your poem, his poem, your afternoon--

"The sea is calm tonight,
The tide is full, the moon lies fair
Upon the straits--"

Could the sea be calm, last night, today? Could it? That was where the perspiration had gone when it left your cheek. It had gone to the sea, had wafted out through the window, over the city's houses,

out over the dust and the playgrounds and the people, gently over the marketplace, and over the apples rotting in the streets, and the butchers swinging strings of sausages, and the people buying and taking home--

When the moisture had left your cheek, it had returned to the sea, mingling with other waters, coming home and knowing its home and being welcomed and given a place to flow, side by side with a billion other droplets--

And if it was there, back with the tide, could the sea be calm? Could it have been calm last night, with your messenger there, part of it? Wouldn't the sea rear itself and thresh about, excited as you were? Did the moon lie fair upon the straits? Didn't the moon see, and understand why the waters could not be still?"

Sunday afternoon. Sunday afternoon. Sunday afternoon. Sunday afternoon was not important. No time was important except when something was happening in it. What was something? Yesterday, of course! Today? Nothing, nothing at all, nothing except maybe time for thinking, time for reliving the important. Today was quiet, and it was right that it was quiet. Memory was silent. Once, in a high school English class--you were a Junior then--once, some boy had written a poem about the "loud rumblings of memory". Silly boy, crazy boy! Memory was silent. The boy had not lived his poem; he had made it up, all of it out of his head. If he had lived his poem, he would have known. But he had been young, and he had not been expected to know. How could anyone know anything when he was a Junior in high school?

You, you, you--there is today and today is nothing except that

it will be over, and then there will be tomorrow and not so much quiet, and tomorrow, looking back on today, today will be important. But nothing is really important except that yesterday had a rowboat in it, and an island and Mr. Lawton, Lawton, Al...

(END OF ITALICS)

Mamma came home, smiling peacefully. Mamma looked serene when she came home from church, and Angie felt she herself did not have to go to church because she always managed to acquire some of Mamma's mood.

"Was very beautiful in church, today," Mamma said. "You should come next week."

"Did they get the new window?"

"Sì."

Mamma described it, waddling around the room, changing her clothes. She laid her hat on the couch, careful to fold the veil back over it, so that it didn't trail on the floor. She pulled her slip up over her head, ripping part of a seam as she struggled to disentangle her arms from the black rayon. Dismayed, she held the slip at arm's length. "I go fix," she told Angie. "Right this minute?" Angie asked. "Sì. Is better I fix now. Otherwise I make mistake and wear slip tomorrow and make more tear in her."

"No, Mamma--why don't you take a rest? You can fix the slip tonight. If you think you'll forget about it, I'll remind you."

"No. I go fix now. Stitch when you need stitch is better than ten later. Is American wise-words."

"You mean, 'A stitch in time saves nine,' don't you, Mamma?"

"Is same thing."

Mamma went to the dresser and took a small blue box from the top drawer. She found a spool of black thread, threaded a needle and sat

down to sew. She worked briskly, humming with the stitches.

"Bambina, where you go yesterday?"

"No place important. Mamma, let's talk about next year, I mean September. What do you think I should do?"

"What you want to do?"

"Go to Music School."

"Oh."

"I know what you're thinking, Mamma--that it's expensive and I'll have to try to get a scholarship or something. I've thought about all that, and that's why I'm practicing so hard all this summer. And then, even if I do get a scholarship, I'll get a part-time job, so I can make some money. After all, I'm seventeen now, and I want to help you take care of things. I mean, it's just the two of us."

Mamma finished her sewing, made three extra hold stitches, and returned the needle and spool to the blue box. She sat quietly, holding the mended slip on her lap. "Bambina," she said. "You go with Tony yesterday?"

"No, Mamma. You know something? I'm hungry."

"Sì. Is time to eat. I go put pot on stove. Come in kitchen, so we talk and I cook same time."

Angie followed her mother who set to work immediately. For all her bulk, Mamma was a whirlwind when it came to cooking. Angie sat down at the table, pulled the grape-bowl toward herself, and ate one grape after another, crunching the seeds with a bone-mangling sound.

"Angelina! You stop that! You break all you teeth and I have big bill to pay dentist."

"No, that won't happen, Mamma. My teeth are strong, and chewing hard things makes them even stronger. I read in a magazine that the

reason people have weak teeth nowadays is because they only eat soft things. This way, I'm really saving you money."

Mamma shook her head. "You read crazy magazines. Pazzo. I sure you do wrong thing when you break seeds with teeth. Grapes you should eat, not pits. If the Dio meant you should eat pits, he make them soft and good like grapes. Magazine no know more than the Good Dio. Anyhow, if you eat pits, they maybe go tear up you stomach. Is not garbage-can. Is stomach. Then, you get bellyache and I have doctor-bills to pay. Is no good for you and is no good for me."

"OK., I'll stop."

"Si. Now you tell me what you do yesterday."

"I'd rather go back to the thing I started talking about--September, I mean."

"I thought all is finished, we make up mind. You get scholarship and maybe little job and we both be happy, yes?"

"But Mamma, there's more to it than just that. The Music School's course lasts for four years, and I'd like you to know that I'm going to work every summer to get more money, to help out."

Mamma sat down, took a fistful of grapes, and chewed each grape individually, methodically. With precise, meaningful motions she removed the pits and lay them like tiny beads in an ashtray. Angie caught the object-lesson of the grapes' pits, and refused to let her mother know it. "That's what happens," she said, "in a house where no one smokes. We use ashtrays to put pits into."

"Angelinamia!" Mamma groaned. "You miss important part of what I do. I want show you what lady does with things she no suppose to eat. She put them away like lady. You Mamma never too old to teach you something, and you no forget that!"

Angie grinned, good-naturedly, picked off a grape-twig and poked it between her teeth. Mamma was aghast. "You take that thing out!"

Angie laughed, removed the twig, and continued talking. "My point is this--do you think that I ought to throw away the whole idea of Music School and scholarship and working and all that, and just get a job? After all, I'm old enough to work now, and I don't like to see you getting so tired all the time. That's why I wanted to talk to you about this, even if we've talked about it before. I wanted to make sure we both knew what we were doing. I mean, no sense me getting started on Music School and then stopping in the middle. If you think I'd be doing the better thing by getting a regular job, then I'll do it, and practice the piano at night. I bet I could get a regular job around here, in that company near the high school."

"NO! You stick with piano and go to Music School. I never, never want to hear you talk like this again! You hear? Never. You play good and you go play regular, not get job regular."

"But I could always practice at night."

"No. That no good. Mrs. Kuller get mad and bang on walls if you play piano late. You know what happen alla time. Is better you go to Music School."

"Mrs. Kuller won't bang on the walls, not anymore at least. She's afraid I might tell people her mother is crazy, or something, not that I would. What do you bet she leaves me alone if I want to practice at night?"

"Angelina mia, I no like the way you talk. Is like--what English word for it?--is like--is like--bribe! Is like gambling, not honest.

Anyhow, is not good idea you should play piano late at night, bad for eyes. I no want to pay doctor-bills for eyeglasses."

"O.K., O.K., I won't practice at night. I won't get a regular job. If I went to work, though, maybe I could practice early in the morning; I could get up a few hours earlier and do my practicing then."

"No! You want wake up everybody? What you think? Make trouble? No, Angelina, you do right thing. You go to Music School, try to get what you call it scholarship, and maybe little job on side. If little job is in afternoon, that no good either, because is important you play piano in afternoon, so no bother people. Maybe school is in afternoon? Then you play in morning, not too early. But no night, and no very early. We good people, no make trouble."

"All right, Mamma. And thanks a lot."

"Why you thank me? I only say what I think right. Now we eat."

"What are we having for lunch? I didn't look to see what you had in the bag you brought home last night."

"We got good lunch--pork chops, bake-potatoes, tomatoes and lettuce-leaves."

"You don't have to say 'lettuce-leaves'. 'Lettuce' is enough."

"All right, so is 'lettuce'. After we eat, you and me go movies, si?"

"Right after lunch?"

"No. First I clean up kitchen, then I iron, then I go listen to radio for while. I go to movies maybe seven o'clock. You come too?"

"Gee, I'd like to. Only I can't because Tony and Jonah are both coming over around seven-thirty. We're going to take a walk, maybe. I don't feel like seeing them tonight, but I promised. I'd rather go to the movies with you, but it's sort of late to break the date. Let's you and I make a date to go together next week, O.K.?"

"Is fine with me."

They ate without speaking for a little while. Then, Mamma with a forkful of potatoes a few inches away from her mouth, looked at Angie perplexedly, and asked, "How come it is Jonah no get girlfriend of his own?"

"No, Mamma. That isn't the way it is with us. It's the three of us. I'm not Tony's girlfriend."

"No? I always think you were. You see him plenty, and is no good for girl to go with too many boys alla same time. People maybe talk, because people is not always so smart and sometimes they get bad ideas. Besides, you growing up now, and is better you stick to Tony."

"Oh, no! Tony is just a friend. He can't be more than that. Why, he, Jonah and I are like the Three Musketeers. Tony and I talk, and we used to do homework together sometimes, but that's all it is. What do you think--that I'm going to marry Tony?"

"Is bad idea?"

"Well, it isn't that it's a bad idea, but Tony is too young for me. You yourself always say that a man should be older than a woman because a woman grows up faster. Acturally, I'm several years older than Tony when you think of it in terms of growing up. Why, Tony is only just starting college!"

"And you only just starting Music School!"

"But it's different!"

"I still no see why it not same thing."

"But Tony is only just my age, in years that is, and you've always said--"

"I know what I always say, but is not same thing. Tony is very intelligente boy, fine boy, clean, good boy. He better than Jonah,

better even than all other boys who same age."

"But, Mamma--Tony is only a good friend, nothing else."

"Believe me, bambina, I no try to talk you into thing. Is only I no understand why alla sudden Tony is young baby in you eyes. I never hear this before now."

"Well, you know, Mamma--a girl grows up sometimes. Things aren't always the same. You yourself said I'm changing every day. I'm not the same as I was in high school."

"In high school? You talk like that was million-billion years ago. Is August now, only August. Two months before, you in high school. So long ago?"

"Well, a lot can happen in a month or so. You yourself said that when you met Pappa, everything happened fast. You got engaged fast, and you got married less than a year after you met him. And Pappa wasn't somebody you had known all your life. He wasn't even one of your brother Pietro's friends. He wasn't even from the same village."

"Still is different thing. Pappa and me--we like each other quick."

"Well, that's what I mean, Mamma. Sometimes two people meet each other and like each other quick. It happens all of a sudden, and it doesn't have to be someone you've known all your life."

"Still not same. Pappa and I, we both got same kind families. Is like you and Tony--he Italian, you Italian, same neighborhood. Is city here, not town. So is different."

"Well, look--Mamma--it's like this: I'm of Italian descent, but I'm American now, and so are you. You have your Citizenship Papers. So I'm not really Italian now, and later on maybe I could marry anyone, so long as he's an American."

"Angelina! I think maybe I get idea about this talk you talking."

"What idea?"

"You tell me one thing, bambina. Where you was yesterday? All day?"

Angie said nothing for a moment. Yesterday. Mamma had said yesterday. It was a semi-magic word all of a sudden, and Angie needed a minute to get to the door and let memory enter. She knew her eyes were lit, and she also knew that Mamma was watching her. Come to think of it, what could she tell Mamma? How would it sound--she had spent the day in the park with an older man, a man she had never really been introduced to. Mamma had been on the verge of asking her about yesterday ever since she had returned from church. Mamma might ask where she had met this older man, and what could the answer be? Could Angie say she had met him one night, coming home from a party? Could she say he had been unable to drive his car because he had been drunk? And with such a man, Mamma would say, her daughter had spent the long afternoon of yesterday? What could Mamma do except condemn it?

Mamma poured herself another cup of coffee. "So now I see you think long enough. All I ask is little question. Where you was yesterday? Is really so hard to make answer?"

"I was in the park. Remember? I told you in the morning that I'd be going to the park, and I took along some poetry. It was awfully hot hot here in the house, and after a few hours of practicing, I thought I'd go cool off, so I went rowing."

"By youself?"

"Well, not exactly."

"Who you with?"

"Do you remember me telling you about that office executive, Mr. Lawton? He works for the Caswell Company--that's the one near the high school. You know the building I mean."

"So I know. What you tell me now, that you go get this man and go in rowboat with him?"

"No, Mamma--I didn't go get him. I bumped into him in the park. He was sitting on a bench, trying to cool off, same as everyone else. We talked for a while, and then a little later, he offered to row the boat for me. So we both went rowing, that's all."

"How old this man?"

"I really don't know, Mamma, but he's very nice--he's intelligent, and good-looking, and very polite."

"He married?"

"No, he isn't married."

"You make date with him for another time?"

"No, Mamma--it was only an accident that I bumped into him yesterday. He's an important executive. He hasn't any time to go around making dates with girls."

Mamma decided her coffee was too hot. She got up and started to gather the dishes while waiting for the coffee to cool. Angie joined her. Mother and daughter worked together efficiently, Mamma washing and Angie drying. As Angie was stacking the dishes in the closet above the sink, it occurred to her that Mamma was taking an unusually long time to decide on a comment. When Mamma avoided an immediate answer (was it really an answer that was necessary?) it meant that Mamma was thinking. Angie smiled to herself. There was an interpretation for this, an under-the-surface interpretation that was very flattering to her. It meant she was growing up. Mamma's silence was as reliable a gauge for her growth as a written statement. Years ago, some years not so long

ago either, Mamma's answers were usually quick in coming. Now, Mamma seemed to take into consideration the fact that Angie was past seventeen. And yesterday, wonderful, wonderful yesterday, Lawton, Al, had greeted her warmly, had treated her as if she were his age, almost.

The inward grin came to the surface. Mamma caught it, cocked her head. "What you thining, bambina?"

"Nothing much. Tell you what--just to show you what a good daughter I am, I'll clear the crumbs off the table, and I'll even wash the sink. You can go into the living-room and listen to the radio. Then, when I'm finished, I'll play the piano for you, if you want."

Mamma hung up the dishrag and wiped her hands on the towel hanging under the closet. "So good alla sudden! I no understand, but you good girl, so everything be all right. Only maybe you should stay away from park?" She went into the living-room and dropped herself heavily on the couch. Angie heard her, and just when she thought Mamma was drowsing, the voice came into the kitchen, unusually low-toned. "Bambina," Mamma was saying, "bambina, I tell you something. No matter what you think, you listen to you Mamma. I want you should not be mean to Tony."

"O.K." Angie answered. She heard her mother's answer, a sigh. Then, there was no sound except for the running water in the sink, and after a few moments, there were gentle snores rising above the living-room couch.

Angie turned off the faucet, wiped her hands, and wandered into the bathroom. Comfortably enthroned on the white seat with the cracked enamel, she reached for and lost herself in the magazine on the hamper.

11.

The city was washing its supperdishes. The streets were quiet. A little girl, a few houses away from Angie's, threw a ball against the stoop steps, rhythmically, assuredly, counting in five's. When her ball hit the top step, she counted ten. When the ball returned to her without a bounce from any but the top step, she added another five. She played alone, seemingly content with the sole opposition of the stone stairway. She counted aloud, in a determined, piping voice.

The rhythmic throwing ceased. The girl paused for careful aim, directed her ball to the top step with great vigor, hit her mark, and received the ball without a bounce. "A hunnerd!" she shouted proudly, with no one to hear her except for Mamma who was on her way to the movies.

Mamma had put on her black dress after her nap, the same dress she had worn to church. Mamma reasoned that although church and the movies were not the same, after all, it was still Sunday. Her eyes were clear and rested, and she saw something that had evaded her in the morning. The hem of her dress was coming down in front. She stopped walking, searched in her handbag for a safety-pin, found it, and secured the hem.

The little girl held the ball in both hands, watching her.

"Whatcha doing, Missus?"

"I fix my dress. When you get big like my little girl, maybe you do the same thing."

"Whyncha sew it, like my mommy does?"

"Because I no got needles and thread in my hand alla time. What

11.

you think--? I no sewing machine in street!"

"You gotta li'l girl?"

"Sì. But she big girl now."

"Will she play with me?"

"No. I no think so. She too big now to play ball."

"But I gotta big ball. I'll let her use it if she'll play with me."

"Well, maybe you ask her when you see her. I no think she play though. She too big. How old you?"

"Five. You talk awful funny."

"Is lot of people on street. All talk different. Not so funny."

"You wanna play ball?"

"No. I go someplace now."

"Take me too?"

"No. You go eat supper. You Mamma look for you."

"Do you know my mommy?"

"No. But I think she look for you."

The little girl turned and looked up at the top-floor window. A woman's face was barely visible. In a moment, the window was open, and the face scowled down. "Margaret! Come up for supper! If you don't come this minute, I'll come down and pull you up by your hair! Come up this instant!" The woman banged the window shut, and disappeared.

Margaret looked helplessly at Mamma Tartrina. "I gotta go like she says. She isn't my real mommy, though. She's only my aunt. My real mommy went someplace a long time ago and she didn't have time to tell me when she's coming back, and I don't like my aunt. She never lets me eat supper with my daddy anymore."

Mamma Tartrina felt a lump growing in her throat. She reached out

to stroke the child's long blonde hair. "But you aunt--she take good care of you, even if she no same as you Mamma. You do what she say."

The child shook her head. "I hate her! And she always calls me 'Margaret'--my real mommy calls me 'Peggy' and I like that better."

Mamma Tartrina crouched down, and held the child's shoulders with her big, warm hands. "I tell you what. I call you 'Peggy' alla time. Whenever I see you, I say 'Hello, Peggy' and then you be happy, si?"

Peggy nodded solemnly. "Thanks, missus," she said. "Thanks an awful lot." "Is O.K." Mamma Tartrina answered, rising to her feet. "Now you go eat like you aunt say she want."

"G'bye, missus."

"'Bye, Peggy. You be good girl now!"

The little girl nodded again, still unsmiling. "Missus--" she said, as Mamma Tartrina was walking away. "Missus--I'll give you my ball for a present. I like you." Mamma turned and smiled at her. "No, you keep ball, Peggy. I come watch you play sometime."

The little girl agreed. "O.K."

"'Bye, Peggy!"

"G'bye!"

Mamma walked away, wondering what would happen to the little girl, the very longely little girl with no one her own age to play with. Angie had been like that, no one to play with for a long time, then Tony and Jonah, but no girls, no little girls to play ball with, or skip the rope. Whose fault was it? Was it Angie's, or her own? If Angie had been different when she had been a little girl, if Angie had had little girls to play with, would she be this way now? She was all right, a good girl, a very good girl, but so many funny, queer things she did! Rowboat with an old man, maybe middle-aged man--was that a good thing to do?

She reached the corner and waited for the light to change. The first year, when she was new in America, her husband had told her to be very careful about watching traffic when she crossed the streets. He had worried about her so much that she had been made to feel like a child, not at all like a grown-up married woman who had crossed the ocean by herself, fearful that her new and strong husband would not be able to find her when she arrived.

Despite her worries, he had found her, her husband, the powerful, quiet, gentle Giuseppe. She remembered that he had allowed her to call him Giuseppe as was her custom, for only half a week. Then one evening, he asked her to sit beside him on the couch. Tenderly, as if she were a child, he told her that America was different from Italy, and that even names were different. Tartrina, his family name, he would never change, for all the Americas in the world, he would never change it, but Giuseppe was going to be Joe. Already the men he worked with called him Joe, so Joe it was going to be.

Peggy's aunt called her Margaret, and it made Peggy unhappy. Poor, poor little girl!

Now, Mamma remembered how she tried to remember to call her husband Joe, as he wanted, but sometimes she forgot and called him Giuseppe. He never corrected her, and eventually, he became Joe for all time.

Mamma whispered to herself. "But I think in Heaven they call him Giuseppe anyway." She crossed the street.

There was no line of people outside the theatre. Mamma stood at the box-office, searching in her handbag for her purse. "How many?" asked the cashier, suspiciously, probably thinking that a few children

were hiding behind Mamma's bulk. "Jus' me," Mamma said, putting her money on the counter. The cashier made change, and Mamma entered the theatre, walking quickly past the candy-counter, not looking, lest she be tempted. "I too fat already anyhow," she mused. She found a seat near the front of the room. "Maybe I should get glasses?" she whispered very softly, and two people nearby who heard her, nudged one another. Mamma saw them, and walked back a few rows so as not to be near them.

The picture had begun: It was about a composer who had been inspired by the rhythm of moving train wheels. "Hoop-de-da-da, hoop-de-da-da, Hoop-de-da-da!" The sound had beaten so fully into the composer's memory that for many nights he had been unable to sleep. "Hoop-de-da-da, hoop-de-da-da, hoop-de-da-da!" had flowed from his memory out onto his bed, scaling the walls, going to the ceilings. "Hoop-de-da-da, hoop-de-da-da, hoop-de-da-da!" The water dripping from the faucet altered its pattern and emerged as part of the "hoop-de-da-da, hoop-de-da-da, hoop-de-da-da!"

A thousand voices sang ethereally in a celestial chorus. Soft, soft, softer, melodic, insinuating, insistent, then loud, louder came the sound in the composer's bedroom.

"Hoop-de-da-da, hoop-de-da-da, hoop-de-da-da!"

The composer tore off the blankets and leaped out of bed. He tied a bathrobe quickly, nervously around his throbbing body, and rushed to the piano. In the darkness, he played four notes. He turned on the lights, seized paper and pencil, and fingering the piano with his left hand, he wrote with his right.

Miraculously, the piano was joined by the sound of a full orchestra playing "Rolling Along," a currently-popular song. "Ah hah! I understand!" Mamma said to herself. "The song she start from when he hear the train go 'hoop-de-da-da!'"

"Hoop-de-da-da!" shouted the composer on the screen. "Hoop-de-da-da, hoop-de-da-da, hoop-de-da-da! I knew it was there! I knew the song was there in those wheels, waiting for me, singing the notes over and over again, hoop-de-da-da!"

The scene closed with the composer, still in his bathrobe, triumphantly playing the composition on the piano. The invisible orchestra grew very loud, then faded as the scene changed.

Mamma Tartrina's mind wandered. She thought of Angie. Then she thought of little Peggy, and then Peggy and Angie became one and the same, b ut only for an instant. When she tried to see Angie playing ball against a stoop, she saw only the growing-up Angie, the girl who wandered off by herself into the park. Who was that man?

Looking at the screen with half of her attention, she thought of Angie and the piano. Music, piano music. Composition. Angie was a very smart girl, and she was more than a little bit like the composer. How many times had Angie climbed out of bed and gone into the living-room to play the piano in the middle of the night? Lucky that Mamma had sharp ears, or else the whole neighborhood would be mad at the Tartrinas. But maybe, someday Angie would sit down at the piano, late at night, and she would be sitting, thinking of the music in her head, and then--

"Hoop-de-da-da, hoop-de-da-da, hoop-de-da-da!"

The screen reclaimed Mamma's attention. Her reverie interrupted, she watched the composer, now famous, slowly wearying of his fame.

He was in his bedroom again. Morosely, he glared out of the window. With his head slumping, he turned to his friend who was standing beside him. The composer waved his arm in front of the window. "There!" he said. "There--the city is mind, all mine. But have I anything? No, nothing! I am alone, ALONE! She is gone, gone for good. It's all over!"

The friend was sympathetic. His forehead was furrowed. He consoled the composer. "There, there--your life is before you, old man. Straighten up, that's the boy! Don't lose heart! There's always a silver lining! It's always darkest before the dawn! There's a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow! Cheer up! Buck up, my boy! That's the spirit! Remember it, and you're all right! You can't lose! Well, don't take any wooden nickels--see you in church!"

The friend went away.

Mamma Tartrina was perplexed dor the second time that day. "Why he talk like that? He no help the composer feel better."

The picture moved on its multicolored path.

The end came. The composer was agin in his bedroom. This time, he lay abed, his face drawn, his hand feeble and shaking. His hair, greyed at the temples, was tousled. Several friends clustered around the bed, looking down at him with uniform dejection. The composer, one of them commented, was dying of heartbreak. "I am wealthy," the composer moaned, "but what use is it, what use?" He seemed to be sinking under the sheets. "What use, what use? I do not have the only woman I have ever really wanted..."

Thereupon he died. The bedroom held no sound. The drapes before the open window blew outward into the night. One of the friends whispered, "A musical soul is departing." The friends looked sadly from one to another.

The picture faded with a view of an ethereal, slow-moving train, chugging, flanked by clouds, through the heavens. Softly, for the last time, reverent singers chanted a solemn, sad "Hoop-de-da-da, hoop-de-da-da, hoop-de-da-daaaaa..." The orchestra became loud, reached a peak, and fell. A vast greyness pervaded the screen, and the words "The End" loomed briefly as the last "Hoop-de-da-da" dimmed and vanished.

Mamma did not like the way everything got so dark all of a sudden, she didn't like the way the composer died. "I like ends should be happy," she whispered, and thought of getting a candy bar. She opened her handbag, and her heavy comb fell to the floor. Several people stared at her. Mamma found the comb, and decided she would upset too many people in the row if she went to the candy counter. She felt painfully aware of her fatness.

She sat throught the newsreel, the advertisements of the coming attractions, and finally the second movie.

A little after eleven o'clock, she left the theatre and strolled home. She felt better than she had felt all day, despite the unhappy ending. She was relaxed like when Joe would come home from work with a bagful of sandwiches, big eroe sandwiches. He would tell her that it was because he felt good, and they had to celebrate. She would not have to cook that evening, and that always made her feel like a real rich woman. That was in the early days of their marriage, of course. Later on, after Angie was born, there were fewer celebrations. Even

eroe sandwiches cost less when Mamma made them at home.

Yes, the movies were good. Mamma liked the picture about the composer, except that it was not right that he should die. The other picture was about cowboys. Too much killing. Too much drinking in the barroom. Three girls in the picture--all three loved the same cowboy, but he loved only his horse and his guitar. At the end, the cowboy married the girl who had fed his horse a lump of sugar. At least it looked like he was going to marry her. The two of them had walked into the sunshine, holding hands, with the horse following them. It was a pleasant ending, but all in all, Mamma didn't like the picture as much as the one about the composer. She thought about it all the way home.

The pillow, that night, met the head of a dreamful Mamma whose thoughts churned with Angie's future, a little girl named Margaret whose aunt wouldn't call her Peggy, and a ball bouncing against a stoop. Mamma thought of these things, and then she remembered that tomorrow meant work, and waking early. She wondered if she could get another raise in maybe six months. Then, when the drowsiness became acute, she thought Angie--Angelina and the piano. Funny, that Angelina should have been asleep when Mamma came home--so early? Maybe it was just that she was tired. But she hadn't practiced much that day; so why so tired?

Mamma heard a ball bouncing in her head, and at the same time, she heard piano-music. There were colors in her head, too, and they were the colors that had been on the screen, not the cowboy picture, the other one.

Her eyes seemed glued. Her body, warm and thick,was as if joined in marriage to the bed. Her legs were asleep, and she did not know if the rest of her had followed. Her arms lay flat, imbedded in the mattress. Her throat felt like a little mountain below her chin.

Even though her ears were asleep, Mamma could not fail to hear, the moment before she slumbered, one last, final hoop-de-da-da...

••••

Midnight. Tony and Jonah turned the corner of Adams Avenue and Jason Street. Tony stopped walking, and sat down on a fire hydrant. "Let's wait a while," he said. "Wait for what?" Jonah snapped back. "They get crowded after twelve o'clock."

Tony pretended to look for a pack of cigarettes in his jacket pocket. Jonah pulled out his own pack, lit two cigarettes, and handed one to his friend. "Who're you kidding?" he asked. "I know you practically never carry butts. You're just stalling again."

"No, it's not that," Tony tried to reassure him. "I'm sort of tired, that's all." Jonah laughed, throwing his head back. "This lad's never tired! Just get me where I can function, and you'll see. Why should I be telling you, though--you said you'd been here before."

Tony dropped the cigarette and ground it flat before he looked back at Jonah. Jonah glanced down at the crushed tobacco. "Say--you didn't even get three puffs out of that!" Tony shrugged his shoulders. "I guess I didn't feel too much like smoking."

"Well, that's your business. You ready now?"

Tony shook his head. "Wait a few minutes, huh?"

Jonah's grin was white-toothed, contrasting with the darkness of his face. Even in the dark, Jonah's sunburn shone. "By the way," Tony said, "I forgot to ask you where you got that tan."

"In the park," Jonah told him, curtly, bringing down the corners of his mouth. In the park, rowing, he thought, rowing the same time Angie was on the lake with that old guy, only that wasn't any of Tony's business, unless Angie wanted to tell him herself. Lucky that Angie hadn't noticed him rowing--especially when she was over on the island, kissing the guy--all right, all right, only on the cheek.

He shifted from foot to foot. "Looka here, pal," he said. "I'm tired, gee--getting more tired by the minute. If you want to sit and gas around some more, let's find a place to sit down. No more room on that hydrant you're on."

"All right," Tony agreed. "How about that step over there?"

They sat down. Jonah was gentler now, showing a concern for his friend. Tony recognized the change in tone, and tried to explain. "Jo--it's like this--I have to be really in the mood for this before I can go in. Maybe I'm too temperamental."

Jonah nodded vigorously. "You're not kidding, pal! Temperament isn't the word for it. You know what I think? I think you've never had a hunk of she in all your life."

"Sure I have!"

"You don't have to lie to me. It's no disgrace, but you've sure wasted a hell of a long time!"

"Maybe so."

"No maybe about it. The old gismo is liable to get sore at you for mistreatment. You need a woman regular. Hell! If I don't get

down here a couple of times a week, I'm a solid wreck. It's good for you!"

Tony untied and retied his shoelace. He picked up a pebble and threw it into the gutter, angrily. "Damn," he muttered. "Goddamn."

"Take it easy, pal, " Jonah said. "No sense getting p'd-off over this. If you don't feel like going on, it's no skin off me."

Tony did not answer. Jonah finished his cigarette and tossed it into the gutter, still lit. He crouched forward, with his elbows resting on his knees. "If you haven't got enough money on you, I can stake you to it. Your word's good with me."

"That's not it,"Tony answered, shaking his head. "You know I always carry money with me."

Heels clicking on the pavement caught Jonah's attention. He whistled without bothering to inspect the women. Tony felt suddenly annoyed at his friend. Nowadays, Jonah didn't even bother to look at women before whistling at them. No, he wouldn't say anything about it--after all, despite his faults, Jonah was a good friend.

"No," Tony repeated. "It's all right about the moeny. I have enough in my wallet."

Jonah poked him playfully. "I can't figure you out, Tony boy. If you were really smart, and you wanted to get out of going to the cat-house with me, you could have said you were broke. You know I never carry too much money on me, so I wouldn't have beenable to stake you. I was only kidding when I offered to. But Tony boy--my pal Tony is an honest one--if he has money , he says so. Honest Abe Tony! You got a middle name? I'll give you one--Lincoln."

His friend tried to laugh. He managed a snicker, and asked for another cigarette. "They're wasted on you, pal," Jonah said. "But have

one anyway. Maybe you'll manage four puffs this time."

Tony wondered if he could joke his way out of the tenseness that was rising like an unseen personage on the step, looming between him and Jonah. "Want to match pennies?" he asked. "Jesus!--You're nuts," said Jonah.

There was a finality and a bluntness to Jonah's last words. "I'm going home," Tony said, hurt. "Maybe I'll see you tomorrow, but I'm not sure. So long." He stood up, started to walk away, but was stopped by a tug on his arm. Jonah was standing, and when Tony turned to look at him, he saw that he was smiling. "I'll walk you around the block," Jonah offered. "And look, pal --if I said anything that hit you the wrong way, I'm sorry."

Underneath the streetlamp at the corner, a middle-aged woman, who looked older because she was haggard, stood, grinning at nobody in particular. "So conventional," Tony murmured. "Streetlamp and all, just like in the books."

"Yeh," Jonah agreed. "They usually don't stand around like that anymore. Most of the time, they got it organized. This one's probably a free-lance. Maybe we ought to wise her up on how to conduct her business."

"You mean tell her how to be a professional?" Tony asked, loosening up a bit.

"Yeh," Jonah answered. "Yeh."

They continued to walk. "One more block," Jonah said,"and then I'll leave you. I want to get back on Jason Street before they decide they've made too much money for the night." Tony slackened his pace. "It is getting sort of late," he said. "Even for Jason Street."

At the next corner, Jonah seated himself on the curbstone. Tony dropped down beside him.

"Tony boy--"

"What?"

"I meant what I said about no hard feelings."

"I know."

"Yeh."

"Jo--I can't really explain this. It's just the way I feel now; it can change overnight, but right now, it's no good for the Street."

"Sure, Tony boy, let it ride for tonight."

Tony nodded. Jonah undid his pocket button and pulled out his wallet. "I think I'll check again, just to make sure," he said. He counted the bills, found them satisfactory, and returned the wallet to his pocket. "Sort of dark," Tony said. "Make sure you don't give out any fives for singles."

Jonah jumped to his feet. "Pal," he said. "no chance of that, don't worry. After all, a five always has a special feel to it. Y'don't have to see the numbers, or the picture of Lincoln."

"No?"

"No. And speaking of Lincoln reminds me about honesty. Tony boy--let me ask you the top question for the night. Then, I'll let you go home."

Tony knew what was coming, and even thinking about it gave him a sick, guilty feeling. Jonah was going to ask him if he was still a virgin. Problem: How could he prevent Jonah from asking him outright? Jonah would see through an evasive answer, would put the question on a yes or no basis. "Answer me straight," he would say, and Tony would have to answer first, and slink home afterward.

"Well, pal, here's the question," Jonah pressed on. "It's just a plain yes or no I'm asking for. You've listened to me talk about women. You never say anything directly about yourself, always act like you know what I'm talking about, but you'd rather not tell me about your own little deals. Now, a guy gets tight-mouthed for only one of two reasons. It's either because you just don't feel like boasting, or else it's only because you've got nothing to talk about. In your case, I don't know which it is, but I got my ideas. Now, let me have it straight."

Tony interrupted him. "Jo--let me tell you something before you go into details. I'm very tired, and upset, and I don't feel like answering any more questions. And besides, I don't have to. So let's say so long now, and I'll try to see you tomorrow."

"But you don't even know what I'm going to ask you--"

"No matter."

"OK. I'll skip the top question. But tell me what you're upset about."

"Some other time."

"O.K. again, but I got my ideas. You upset about Tart?"

"Don't call her that. She can't stand it."

"She isn't here now. You don't have to fight her battles for her."

"You're supposed to be her friend, too; I was only reminding you."

"O.K. you don't have to tell me what's eating you, because you just gave it away. It's Tart's fault--the way she acted tonight."

"No, it isn't Angie's fault. I don't want to talk about it. At any rate, I'm holding you up. Didn't I hear you say you wanted to get there before they made too much money for the night--whatever too

much money is?"

"Sure, Tony boy--you heard straight. Only, let's finish this up."

"I'd rather go home."

"I'd rather help you."

"I don't need any help."

"I think you do."

"I stand on my rights. If I want to put this conversation off for another time, it's my privilege to do so."

Jonah whistled between his teeth, two short notes, similar to those he had used when the women had passed by. "Tony boy," he said, "cut the fancy language. We don't have to get big-shotty with each other. Let me put it this way, pal. I know what's going on--I was there with you when Angie got snotty on us. I like Angie, same as you, only maybe not in the same way. You want her for a steady, and I like her for a friend. But I don't like seeing you get so blazing mad because she tells us she wants to sit around instead of go for a walk, and then she says she wants to go to sleep early and we should please go home. So what if it was only ten o'clock? It gave us the rest of the evening to come down here and get an early start on the Jason Street dames. We could have been here over two hours ago--but you have to go decide to walk around half the town before you get into the mood. So I walked with you, jerk what I am, and now what? You're <u>still</u> mooning!"

Tony waved his hand, across and downward, disgustedly. "Nah, Jo--you don't understand. I know her better than you do. She wasn't tired; she only wanted to get <u>rid</u> of us."

"So what?"

"Do I have to tell you everything? It's easy to figure out. She's tired of us, or rather, of me, and I'd like to know what made her that way."

"Don't let it eat you. She's young. She'll learn."

"No, Jonah--something must have happened, and I'd give anything to know what made her that way."

"Don't let it eat you. She's young. She'll learn."

"No, Jonah--something must havehappened, and I'd give anything to know what it is. "

The pack of cigarettes in Jonah's pocket was empty when he poked his finger into it. With a soft, hissed, "Fttt!" he tossed the cellophane-covered wrapper over his shoulder. All the stores are closed, too," he said. "Damnit, why don't I remember to carry two packs at a time?"

Tony patted his pockets, knowing there were no cigarettes in them. "Sorry I can't help you."

"Yeh, I know."

"Tell you what--if you walk back with me to my house, I can give you one of my pop's packs. He has a few cartons--gets them by mail to save tax."

"I thought your pop was rich."

"He's comfortable, but he says he got that way by remembering to save pennies."

"That's what they all say. Wait'll I get rich--I'll show you how to live. I'll toss pennies around like dirt. You have to spend your money--no fun otherwise. You know the old rule--you can't take it with you!"

"Maybe."

Tony's right leg was asleep, from the knee down. He tried stepping on it. "Everything happens to me," he said.

"Your foot?"

"Yes."

"Wiggle the toes."

"That's what I'm trying to do."

"Keep at it. Hell, I remember once I had both my feet asleep, and they had a fire-drill in the school. I thought I'd die, stinker of an ache."

I'll bet."

They remained silent while Tony tried to stand up. "It needs some more wiggling," he said.

"Sure,"Jonah said. "I'll go back to Jason Street, and you keep wiggling until you feel better. You don't need me around for that. I'll see you tomorrow, like you said."

"No, wait."

"It's getting too damned late. We can talk tomorrow. I got better things to do now."

"But, Jo--we haven't finished discussing Angie."

"It'll hold, kid."

When Tony tried to stand up, he found he could. "Jo--" he began. "Now there's something I want to ask you. Then, I'll go home."

"Yeh?"

"Is there anything you know that I don't know about?"

"Puh-lenty! But is it my fault that you don't want to go to Jason Street and learn about the birds and the bees?"

"That isn't what I'm talking about. I meant--do you know anything about how Angie feels, or anything that's happened to her that I don't

know about?"

"Come now," Jonah said, holding up his hand like a traffic policeman. "Gentlemen aren't supposed to talk about ladies in barrooms. Hey, look--isn't it funny? Me telling you about good manners. Say, Tony boy--that's a laugh!" He laughed,and started to walk away. "So long--"

"Come on back. Let's finish this, Jo--"

"Tomorrow, next year, not now. I got things to do."

"I think you're hiding something."

"Goshalmighty! You know why I'm in a hurry. Too much time kicked away as it is. Be seeing you--" He walked away, briskly, whistling through his teeth, tunelessly. After a few minutes, Tony went home.

12.

Should he go in? Should he try to go to sleep? Should he read a while first? Should he walk the streets all night? Should he go back to Jason Street and try to find Jonah? Should he sit himself down at his desk and try to analyze Angie scientifically? Should he make up his mind once and for all to see other girls, to see Angie as infrequently as possible, to stop taking her with melodramatic seriousness? Should he try to accept the maybe-fact that Angie was interested in another man? But who? Should he stay up all night and go see Angie first thing in the morning to insist that they talk over the problem? Whose problem? His, not Angie's. Apparently, she didn't care how he felt. What was she doing right this minute? Sleeping, nothing else. Was she mooning around in her doorway worrying about him? No. Of course not!

Why had she asked them to leave? She was tired, she said. Impossible. No girl could be tired and look like that--blue eyes cheerful and awake, warm and lit right from the soul of them. Tired? Does a tired girl go about with pink cheeks? Does she have a mouth that looks as if it's torturing itself to keep from smiling?

She wanted to get rid of them; that was the only logical answer. She wanted them to leave, both of them, Tony and Jonah. Goodbye. Be seeing you. Toodle-oo. Sweet dreams. She practically pushed them out of the door. So where did Jonah come off laughing about it? Big joke. What difference did it make to Jonah? Jonah was a friend of Angie's--he didn't care about her the other way.

"Sophocles long ago
Heard it on the Ægean, and it brought
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
Of human misery..."

That blasted poem! She had read it twice, with Jonah squirming and saying over and over again something about "female culture". Then, right before she had kicked them out, she started reciting parts of it from memory. He had found himself squirming, just like Jonah was doing, and Angie had laughed at him. "Tony, I thought you liked 'Dover Beach.'" Jonah had a big laugh out of that, too. "Tony boy," Jonah had said. "Yeh, we thought you liked poetry. Don't tell me you're turning into an uncultured brute like me!"

Tony felt a rush of anger, remembering Jonah's way of being flippant. How could Jonah be a friend and treat Tony's problems like a botch of comicbook humor? Anyway, how could Angie be on the verge of a grin all the time they had been there, and be able to read a cynical thing like 'Dover Beach'? Bet she was reciting it now in her sleep...

He thought of her asleep. Once she had fallen asleep on the grass at a picnic. It had been a private picnic, just for himself and Angie. Each of them had brought along two sandwiches, and they had swapped one apiece. Long time ago--they had been high school sophomores.

She had slept like a baby, with a smile on her face, and her fist around a clump of stones. She wanted to take the stones home for the mantelpiece, for some crazy reason of her own. That didn't matter. But there she had been, sleeping with nothing under her head, and he had rolled up his sweater and slipped it under, like a pillow. Two hours she had slept, and when she woke up, she thanked him for the

sweater. He remembered how when he had undressed that evening, the sweater had the smell of Angie's hair in it, and he had slept with it all night, and then in the morning, Pop came in to wake him, and when Pop saw the sweater, all curled up like a teddy bear, he had laughed himself silly. Tony had sworn it was an accident, that he had only forgotten to put it with the rest of his clothes on the chair, but Pop had gone right on laughing. Later that day, Pop had taken him aside and given him five dollars, saying a woman was better than a sweater, and if he wanted an address, Pop could give him one.

He jingled the key in his hand. Should he go in? If he walked the streets all night, nobody would say anything about it. His mother might be worried, but Pop would put her at ease. Pop was just waiting for him to start staying out all night. No figuring out what Pop liked. He was an individual like nobody else. Take someone else, for instance--Jonah's father called Jonah a bum everytime he got home late.

Tony took out the key to the haberdashery, and entered the store. He stood without moving until his eyes were accustomed to the darkness. He had not been in the store at night for a long time, and perhaps Pop had moved things around in the afternoon, so it wasn't safe to walk by feel. He found his father's desk, and reaching to the wall above he turned on the tiny night light.

The necktie counter covered half of the wall space on the left side of the store. Tony stared down at the racks, remembering that he had helped in assembling them. There were a few rows of striped ties--"repps" and small-patterned ties. They occupied about one-fifth of the total tie space. Then, the same, accustomed thing happened when

Tony looked at the remaining four-fifths of the counter. Except for a handful of bows, woolens and knits, the remaining area was devoted to broad-patterned ties, some flowery, some vertically-striped, some geometric doodling, all of them wild. Tony looked at them, and felt a sort of internal pandemonium, as if all the tie-designers were dancing around in circles, throwing bolts of loud-patterned silk all over the room. "Monstrosities!" Tony had declared to his father when the latest shipment had arrived. "All noise, a lot of noise, that's what they are," his final judgment had been, but his father had disagreed. "They sell," he always said. "That's all I'm interested in."

Tony walked to the very end of the counter, and surveyed what he considered the most garish specimens in the whole tie world--the hand-painted ones. He shuddered. "Hey Pop!" he had said, "why don't you order some more of those woolens to soften the stock, to sort of offset these things?" Pop had carefully explained to him that woolen ties were only for high school teachers and college students. Pop always oversimplified things. Now, Tony slid an orange, grey and fuschia creation off the rack, and fingered it with distaste. Really, though--why was it that most of the men in the neighborhood bought the wild ties--the loud ones down the counter most of the time, and these hand-painted things when they felt like splurging?

One time, he had discussed it with Angie. "I guess it's their only chance to express themselves," had been her comment. It sounded logical. But what kind of expression was it that manifested itself in weird color combinations? Well, not exactly <u>weird</u>; perhaps <u>garish</u> was the more exact description. What kind of expression was purple

and orange? All right, not exactly orange--a sort of muted tannish-orange, to be more specific. Still--look at the cuckoo pattern--big circles, little circles, checks, all on one four-foot length of silk.

"To express themselves." It made sense, he supposed. It would be good, he thought, if he could express himself that easily. "Hey, Pop," he could imagine himself saying, he could just hear it! "Hey, Pop, I have to express myself. Give me that red tie with the white and yellow semicircles swimming around like sick fish." Or maybe he could say, "Hey, Pop--I have to express myself. Maybe you'd better give me another tie instead--the one with the big green things on it, you know the one--it looks like it's full of devil's horns, the new specialty number."

Something was happening inside of him again, and this time it was as if the hair-scented sweater was pressing against his cheek, and he was nuzzling it. A moment of softened Angie-scent, and then--

"Sophocles long ago
Heard it on the Aegean, and it brought
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
Of human misery..."

Damn! Now he was stuck with it too. Goddamn! He'd be hearing the poem in his sleep. He'd shake it off, he knew how. Mind over matter.

What had he been thinking of? Oh, yes, self-expression! Hey Pop--give me a dozen of your loudest ties. I want to express myself with extra variety!"

He opened a drawer marked "Special" in small, pen-written letters. The ties inside were all hand-painted, but unlike the ones on the rack, these had pictures of people on them. More self-expression,

he thought. He could just see himself gliding up to Pop, saying, "Pop, see this one here? That's right--the one with the puh-ritty (he sounded like Jonah!) pink nude on it. That's right, Pop--this is the one. I'm taking it for my collection. I want to express myself!"

Help wanted: One female. He felt himself blushing, and he thought of that old disputable question that philosophy teachers like to use for warm-up exercises: if a tree falls in the middle of the desert, seen by no one, does the tree fall, really fall? That probably wasn't the way the line was phrased, but it went something like that. If no one was around to see him blush, was he really blushing? Sure he was! His face--he was touching it--was hot and tingling. Well, his fingers were tingling, then, not his face. His face was hot, though, and it wasn't the weather because it was cool inside the store. He remembered another stupid question someone had worried about: if you tickle your ear with your finger, where is the sensation, in the ear or in the finger? Both, he remembered answering. So perhaps his face was tingling, too.

This was stupid and getting stupider by the minute. Getting upset over a tie with a nude picture on it, a loud hunk of silk made to satisfy a bunch of unsatisfied men--

Look who's talking! Who was he, he berated himself, to sit in judgment of other men! He was acting like he was the most satisfied male to walk the city's streets. Sure, he literally stunk with satisfaction! Right now, right this minute, Jonah was off on Jason Street behaving like a healthy man should, recognizing a need and taking care of it in the only way he knew. He wondered what Jonah thought of

him. Jonah probably knew the truth about his stinking virginity. He had come close to asking him outright, but even if he had lied about it, Jonah wouldn't have been fooled. Jonah was tough, and sometimes crude, but he was nobody's fool.

Perhaps he could sit down and talk to Jonah about it--? But would it be safe? Would Jonah tell anyone? Some people went around with a sort of honest way of gossiping. So long as they didn't know something for a fact, they'd keep it to themselves, but as soon as they learned it was verbatim true, they'd broadcast it. Jonah was like that, sometimes, and right now he didn't for sure know about Tony, so he wouldn't tell anyone. Better leave it as it was--only conjecture, inference, ad infinitum...

The tie was cool and soft in his hand. The seductively-drawn body seemed illuminated, the face looking at him, asking him a throaty why. Why? Slow and sensuous, why, why--

He fingered the tie, tracing the curves of the over-breasted body. Round, round, up the thigh, round, round up the thigh, soft, stroking, gentle, touching, soft, round, up, up, up, on the breast, around and around, curved cupping, gentle pushing--

The nipples were pink, with a tiny red pinpoint of a dot in dead center, giving an almost three-dimensional effect, but he wasn't thinking of the artistry now; now the night was still, and there was nothing he was thinking of now, now with the tie held up close to his face, and a rising bulge on him, and a tongue reaching out, tasting silk, and not knowing it, a hand stretching down, around, tight, closed, a face hot and wet, and the tongue busy, tip-touching the tiny red circle.

...

13.

After her visitors had left, Angie, unable to sleep, went for a walk. The ocean, a few streets from her home, blew snatches of nocturnes onto the short expanse of pebble-and-garbage shore. Angie found a rock and climbed onto it...

She was mystified, dazed. She clutched the sides of the rock, sitting absolutely still, lest some sound escape her. She ached to hear them all, every one--every wail, groan, every sound of merriment, every cry of pain, every whimper, whisper, giggle, laugh, every beast or human moving about the streets, in the houses, even the creatures beneath the black waves of the ocean.

Then, in a burst of ecstasy, she arose from the rock, quietly, afraid of distrubing even the earth. Someone was playing a violin, maybe half a street away, and the music was an island and an afternoon, a memorable yesterday. Suddenly, all became too glorious to bear, and no need to hear remained, no need save for silence. She climbed onto the rock, became motionless, a statue with the rock as her pedestal. She stared into the sky.

The sounds returned--the waves, the tingles of the night, all the sounds, mixing and strengthening. Now she heard the elusive ones--why, there, there! The sound of a baby crying! And there--! A cat sliding into an ashcan. Listen! There--a trolley stopping at a faraway streetcorner! People going home. There! Young men singing, giggling girls blending voices. There! A grinding noise. It is a groan? Is it one or many? Many people groaning all at once, mingling

with the singing voices?

Who was she? What was it? Why was it? Why was anything? "Night," she said, softly, "night, I ask you--why so much beauty? Why? Is it mine? Does it belong to the whole world? Why did you make it? How? Tell me, please--who am I?"

She climbed off the rock, suddenly afraid that someone had heard her. She idled her way home, made her bed, and slept, with the ocean and the night as bedfellows. She fondled her pillow, and dreamt of the island, and cried happily in her sleep.

14.

Early Monday morning, Angie woke up glowing. She dressed haphazardly, knowing there was no possible chance of encountering Lawton, Al, on the streets. She ate the last doughnut from yesterday's box, and half of an apple. She left the tenement quietly, so as not to disturb anyone.

The city streets were dark. It was only five o'clock in the morning of a day that promised rain. The streets were hot; they needed the rain. Angie thought of how badly the streets needed the rain. She smiled, as if she had a secret, anticipating the quenching of the streets' thirst. She looked at the clouds, almost expecting them to burst immediately.

Angie did not care if it rained, even if it started to rain now. She walked blithely on, with her antelope strides, now interspersed with occasional hops. She tried, but could not walk in a manner befitting a younglady. She loped, head up, arms swinging, walking rapidly past houses still slumbering, past vacant lots, and past garbage cans with uncollected contents.

Did Mr. Lawton, Lawton, Al, ever notice the neighborhood? How dirty it was? Did he mind? No, he couldn't. He was bigger than that. He would like it now, though, wouldn't he, with the morning unbegun, with houses asleep. If only he were with her! They could walk together, and laugh joyfully together at the wonder of the morning.

"Taxpayer to be Erected" read a large sign on the wire fence in

front of a vacant lot. Angie giggled. Are they going to erect a taxpayer, she wondered, giggling again. Everything was wonderful this morning, wonderful, intoxicating, and there was happy laughter in the air.

Mr. Kopsky, opening his grocery store for the day, smiled at her. Why, Angie thought, he's never smiled at me before. Is it because I'm out walking so early? I never noticed--he's a nice-looking man, even if he is as fat as a butter-barrel. And maybe he isn't silly because he combs his hair sideways. He can't help it if he's getting bald. Besides, not everyone can look like Mr. Lawton, Al.

She marched on. A wonderful day! A mirth-provoking and soul-satisfying day!

Somewhat breathless, she shortened her strides, going slowly past O'Casey's Cafeteria. She peered in and saw people breakfasting on greasy dough-lumps and coffee, people who at noontime would eat crazy things like chopped-garbage-on-rye and iced carbonated drinks. She grinned. Oh, those poor fools, she thought, they'll die, the dough-lumps, and the chopped things, and the sugar-coatings they eat. Those poor people, they'll die. They'll get stomach ulcers and die. But why am I grinning?

With a shake of her head, as if to clear it of worries about other people's future gastronomic ills, she proceeded towards the playground.

The swings hung quietly on their slightly-rusted chains. The see-saws were diagonal, slanting in harmony with the sleek, curved board called by the children, "the sliding pond." The "monkey-cages,"

metal poles vertical and horizontal, easily climbed by the youngsters, stood in rigid geometric pattern against the cloud-gathering sky.

Why, Angie scowled--there's something wrong with the playground! "I know why," she whispered under her breath. "The place is deserted!" She thought a minute. "Those swings don't want to just hang there; they want to move. They want to carry Rosie Becker and Eddie Leary and Paul Monti as high as they want to go. I bet those swings have regular contests to see which one of them can go all the way up to the sky and back. And the children think they themselves control the swings! I bet those swings become sad, hanging there quietly all night long with no one to use them. And the see-saws! They might just as well be plain, ordinary boards for all the good they're doing now. They're meant to move up and down!"

Almost forgotten were the years when a plump Angie had had difficulty in finding a partner for her see-saw rides. She had been heavier than the other children. Those who had been sufficiently brave to share a ride with her had frequently found themselves seated on the aloft board end, incapable of descending to the ground unless Angie allowed them to do so. "Don't go on the see-saw with that Fatty-Kid Angie!" the children would warn one another. "She'll bump you, every time. She's a horse, a regular horse!"

Almost forgotten were the cruel years, almost, but not completely. Angie suddenly remembered, and glowered for a moment. Then, the frown vanished, because today she was truly happy and no bad memories could upset her, she wouldn't let them, not today, not after Saturday, and the Island. It would be in capital letters from now on, at least, a capital letter, singular. Island, Island, ISLAND.

Ho! she laughed. Those people who run the parks could have settled

everything. They could have put up signs reading, "No fat children allowed on the see-saws." Then she would have stayed away, and there wouldn't have been any trouble.

She saw the "sliding pond" and smiled, remembering how she had been a pioneer in finding new ways to hurtle a body sleekly down the polished board. She had been the first youngster in her neighborhood to "belly-whop" down, to descent head first, posterior last. Almost landing on her head, she had been saved by the bumper belly of little Freddy Roneberger who had been standing directly infront of the "pond". She thought of him, now, giving him a title, "comrade of past obesity." He had been brave enough to try to stop her fall. Where was he now? Was he still fat? Did it matter? Only Saturday mattered, and the Island.

She took a last look around the playground, and walked out into an awakening neighborhood.

Across the street, facing the barren playground, was an ice-cream parlor managed by a man named "Red". The store was still closed. Angie looked at the window-display. She saw dusty candy-boxes, brightened by surrounding pictures of red-cheeked, healthy young men and women seated at a soda-fountain, looking at the clerk with something like idealistic lights in their eyes, saying "Make Mine Coke!" Angie tried saying it with exuberance; it was not enough. She tried adding a little tenderness to her tone; that did it. She tried it for perfection, combing the words with both exuberance and tenderness. It sounded right. Was the advertiser trying to say that the "coke" was a sort of elixir, a promoter of pink cheeks and sparkling eyes? Probably yes, she thought. Also--the way the people in the picture were smiling--it looked as if coke-drinking made them socially successful. Angie

thought, with a laugh, that when she ran out of friends, she'd pay some extra attention to the sign. Did Lawton, Al, drink "coke"?

She moved rapidly away from the ice-cream parlor. It seemed somehow impure in contrast to the playground, and especially after last night and the rock and the ocean. This was a crazy neighborhood, she thought; everything got thrown into it, hodge-podge. "C'est la vie," she whispered, philosophically to herself, happy that she had studied French in high school. Did Mr. Lawton, Lawton, Al, speak French? She would ask him, next time she saw him. Would she see him again, she wondered? Probably yes. The same way as Saturday, though?

She was almost home. The glow was beginning to disappear. Where had it gone? But where had it come from, all of a sudden, no warning, nothing? Why, last night, she had almost cried, for no reason at all! This morning, tumbling out of bed so very early--she had wanted to jump and laugh and dance on the top of her piano--still without any reason! Now, this very minute, what was left? After the glow, what? A feeling of loneliness, sort of meditative. "C'est la vie," she whispered again.

She wanted to sit alone and think. About what, she asked herself? Why, Life, of course, Life.

She opened the door to the apartment, and found Mamma was awake, waddling around, preparing breakfast. "Hello," she said.

Mamma shook her head. "Where you was? I hear you when you get up. I asleep, but I hear you. Why you go in street so early in day? People maybe see you and think you stay out alla night!"

"No they don't, Mamma. People aren't that dumb. Besides, practically nobody was up."

"Where you was?"

"Just walking. I took a walk before breakfast. I read someplace that some doctors think it's healthy."

"I no think is healthy. Is better you should sleep."

"But it's nice out, Mamma. You'll see when you go to work."

"Next time you feel like this, you turn on you back and go sleep some more."

"No, Mamma--a walk's a walk. Say, how was the movie last night?"

Mamma poured the coffee. "So beautiful it was!" she said, dreamily. "This man he make music in middle of night. I think of you."

"Sounds good."

"Si. Very good movie picture. You go see today, maybe?"

"I don't think so, but you can tell me about it tonight, when you get home."

"I do."

"OK."

"Bambina?"

"What?"

"I tell you something. When you go in street later, if you see a little girl maybe five years old, say to her 'Hello, Peggy.' Special favor to me."

"But how am I going to know which little girl you mean? There are a lot of little kids on this street. I'm liable to go up and say 'Hello,Peggy' to kids with a million other names. Their mothers'll think I'm crazy!"

"Listen to me, Angelina mia. This little girl, she always play by herself, all by herself, with a ball on stoop. She live down that way, near corner."

"O.K., if I see her, I'll call her Peggy. What's the story on it, though?"

"I tell you tonight. No time now."

"All right, Mamma."

Angie rushed around the room, finding food in closets and drawers. When she had accumulated a squirrel-like pile, she flopped into the nearest chair, her feet sprawled out. "Mamma," she said. "You know something? I'm hungry!"

"Si," said Mamma. "So now you eat."

"C'est la vie," said Angie.

"La vita?" Mamma asked.

"Same thing!" Angie shrugged her shoulders.

They drank their coffee.

....

Hating himself, Tony woke up shortly after ten o'clock in the morning. After a quick, snatched breakfast, he descended the back steps and entered the haberdashery from the rear door. He hoped his father wouldn't need him. If the employment agency had sent a new clerk, as promised, Collini, Sr. would not need his son, at least not regularly.

Collini, Sr. was at the front of the store, talking to a stranger. A customer? Tony joined them. "Paley," Collini Sr. said to the stranger, "meet my son Tony." Tony and Paley nodded to each other. "I just hired him," Collini Sr. said, turning to Tony. Tony nodded again. Paley coughed, delicately, and looked out of the front door. Collini, Sr. clearing his throat, added, "I'll break him in this morning."

"Then you won't be needing me?" Tony asked.

"No," his father answered, "The place's quiet on Mondays, so you can take over after supper. I'd rather break him in alone," he added, jerking his thumb over his shoulder, indicating the newly-hired Paley. "Be with you in a minute, Paley," he called to his new clerk who now seemed to be inspecting the window-display.

Collini, Sr. threw his arm around Tony's shoulder and walked with him to the back of the store. Dropping his voice to a hoarse whisper, he asked, "Have a good time last night, son?" Tony looked at him, startled. "Uh huh," he said, wondering what his father was talking about. He couldn't by any stretch of the imagination know about the necktie--?

Collini, Sr. winked. He looked lascivious, Tony thought, and hated himself for such a disloyal idea. His father continued in the hoarse whisper: "Go down to Jason Street with Jonah or alone?"

"With Jonah." (Well, it was true, wasn't it? He had gone to Jason Street with Jonah, hadn't he?)

"Jonah knows the ropes, ha?"

"Uh huh, he's been around."

"So've you, I gather. You got in close to three A.M. last night--I always hear you come in, light sleeper, you know."

"I didn't wake you up, did I? I tried not to make any noise."

"No noise at all, son! I'm a light sleeper."

"Uh huh."

"Well, glad you had a good time."

"I did."

"You didn't have to get up so early. Need your sleep, you know!"

"I didn't feel much like sleeping late; I woke up late enough as it was."

"But you ought to make sure to get your sleep when you can,

especially now that you're man-size. Know what I mean, don't you, son?"

"Uh huh."

"Need any extra money? Don't want you overdoing the Jason Street, but it's good to be prepared. Emergencies, you know."

"I'm all right, Pop. I still have ten dollars left from last week's salary. That should hold me until Thursday."

"No sense being under a strain! I didn't build up this store for myself. I want my boy to be comfortable. Both my children. Your sister certainly grabs her share."

"I have enough, really."

Collini, Sr. pulled out his wallet, grandly. He patted it. Tony saw the gesture as ostentatious, and hated himself for it, again.

"Here," Collini, Sr. said, "take another ten. Pays to be prepared. A man shouldn't be caught short. Bad thing to happen."

"Thanks, Pop."

"Good enough!"

"I guess I'll be going now, so long as you don't need me around here."

"That's right. Have a good time, and remember what I told you. Kids like you don't realize it, but I've been around too, you know."

"Yes."

Collini, Sr. dropped his voice very low so that the hoarse whisper became almost a hiss. "Tony--take some advice--"

"What?"

"Don't get caught in the rain without your rubbers!" Collini, Sr. said, laughing uproariously, slapping his thigh.

Tony left the store embarrassed, wondering if there was something wrong with him because he didn't appreciate his father's sense of humor. After all, his father was a normal, virile man--nothingwrong with him. Still, Tony felt uncomfortable whenever his father drifted into the so-called man-to-man talk. Especially the way he handled it--that secret,"between us men and don't tell your mother" tone of voice, the extra money, almost earmarked for Jason Street, the confidential advice--

He started towards Angie's house. Should he put the visit off for another time? If she were practicing, she might be angry at the intrusion, but it was important, or he wouldn't be bothering her. He decided against postponing the talk. After all, summer was almost gone. In the fall, he would be in college, and she would probably be in Music School. They wouldn't be seeing each other every day, as they had through all the high school years. Things would never be the same again, and the breach between them might become too wide to cross ever again.

All right, so they were young. What did that mean, what difference did it make? He wasn't too young to understand the way he felt about her. Neither was she. The sooner they talked out the situation, the better for both of them. And this time, he would make her listen to him. No getting put off.

Despite the heat, Tony's movements quickened when he reached Angie's downstairs door. He ran up the steps with an autumn vigor and stopped himself, panting, at the apartment door. He walked in. "Hello, Angie," he said.

"Go away, Tony. I'm practicing."

"I know you are, but I want to talk to you. I won't be here long."

She closed the piano lid, and seated herself on the floor, resignedly. "O.K. Tony, sit down and tell me your troubles. I suppose you have troubles."

"Stop that!"

"Stop what?"

"Acting like a martyr, acting like I'm bothering you."

"You are bothering me."

"Unavoidable."

"Ha! You're a fine one--remember when you used to go around saying nothing is unavoidable? Then you became an Emerson addict, and you started saying 'a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds,' etcetera, etcetera, etcetera."

"It is!"

"You and your changing philosophies!"

She scrambled to her feet and went into the kitchen. Tony sat still, bewildered, angry, and suddenly weak, as if all his early-morning punch had been severed at the wrist. Waiting for her to return, he stood up, and folded his arms, trying to force a grimness to his appearance, at least make the way he looked match the way he felt. He was aware, painfully, of how the long-time habit of smiling at Angie could not vary even at this important moment. But, he vowed, if it was the last thing he did, he would get Angie to see how he felt. Not today, perhaps, but soon. It had to be soon, because another stained night would eat into the sould of him, and he would be powerless--

Angie returned with two apples, and tossed one at him. He caught it with one hand. "Zooks!" he said. "If I were down in hell, burning to death, and you threw me an apple, I'd catch it. It's been

a long time for us, hasn't it? And that brings up another point--

"Don't change the subject," she said. "Right now I'm thinking about the way you go around changing philosphies all over the place. I think I know why."

"Why?" he asked, sitting down again and biting into the apple.

"Because you're young," she said, "and young people haven't got a permanent philosophy of life." She shrugged her shoulders and waved her hand in a gesture of futility. "C'est la vie," she added.

She watched him as he put the half-eaten apple on the coffee table. "And you, I suppose," he said, glowering, "have matured and mellowed, so now you can sit around and pass judgment!"

"I didn't say that."

"Well, you're implying that!"

"This is getting boring. I think we've gone through this whole conversation at least twice before, and frankly, I have other things to do."

Tony looked at the unfinished apple. He couldn't look at Angie, not now, not with the terrible tightness in him. He concentrated on the half-apple, and suddenly it started to look like a mature breast, with the green part of it looking diseased. Nausea crept up on him.

"Finish eating it," Angie said, indicating the apple. "Unless you found a worm or something. Or perhaps that's another tendency of youth--to leave things unfinished."

He stormed over to her, seizing her by the shoulders. "Cut it out!" he demanded.

"Let go," she said, sternly, pushing at his chest.

"No I won't!" he insisted. "Not until you tell me what this is all about!"

"What?"

"This youth business!"

"Oh, that."

"Yes, that! I can't help my age. It's chronology, not choice. What's all this sudden emphasis on age, anyway? Do you expect me to like it?"

"Tsk tsk!" she said, and struggled to free herself. Her hair, as she tried to shake away from him, rustled about her face, and the scent seized him. He dropped his hands to her waist. "Angie--"

With one quick, vibrant slither, she moved down and out of his grasp, leaving him standing with his arms holding the air.

She sat down. "Now, Tony--if you still want to talk to me, do it fromacross the room."

He walked dejectedly away, seated himself on the piano-stool, weary. "All right," he said. "You win."

She smiled. "Well, what did you want to talk to me about?"

"If you put it that way--I wanted to ask you why you kicked us out last night, Jonah and me. So far as I can remember, we were a pair of perfect gentlemen, so far as our juvenility would allow, of course."

"Don't be sarcastic!"

"Let's not go through that again. Remember the last time?"

"O.K. So I asked you toleave. I wanted to be alone for a while, and besides, I was tired. I wanted to go to sleep."

"But you didn't look tired. Your eyes were shining, and you looked wide-awake, and it was damned early."

"You'll just have to take my word for it, Tony."

"Did you go right to sleep?"

"Is this a third degree? Do I have to answer all your questions? Next thing, you'll be asking me what I had for breakfast, and did I like

it, and if it wasn't the same thing I ate yesterday, why did I make the change? Go ahead--ask me a million questions!"

"No, not a million. Just why did you ask us to leave so early?"

"It's a woman's perogative."

"The word is prerogative."

"That's what I said!"

"No, you said per-ogative."

"O.K. Let it go for now. But as I said, it's a woman's right to decide she's tired and wants to be left alone. You're acting as if I did something deep-dark and mysterious."

"No, I'm not. I didn't say there was anything sinister in it--just sort of unusual, and I wanted to know if I had done anything wrong. I can ask, can't I?"

"Sure, ask. But I don't have to answer."

"No, I can't force you. But don't I have some rights, as your friend?"

"Friends don't make demands on one another--that's what you said to Jonah when he asked you if you ever kissed me. At least that's what you told me you'd said."

"That's something else."

"No, it's the same thing. If I want to tell you something, I'll tell you without being coaxed. If you bother me, I won't."

"All right, all right. Let's forget it."

Tony opened up the piano, and idly struck thirds. Up and down the keyboard he probed, progressing irregularly as if he were a cat, marching on the keys, and frightened by sounds from another room. The effect was surreal. Tony listened to himself, and was pleased.

"There's nothing I like better," Angie, embittered, broke in, "than to hear someone who can't play the piano try to play. It's so very musical!"

He closed the lid, spun around on the stool, refolding his arms, saying nothing.

Angie finished her apple. "I suppose you're going to sit there all day and keep me from practicing."

"I'll go soon."

"You know I need my practice-time, don't you? I have a lesson to take tomorrow over at Music School. By the way, I don't think I told you about the fall. I'm going to enroll in the School full-time, for a degree, regular."

"You told me."

"Well, now it's definite."

"I'm glad."

"You don't care about that part of me at all, do you? The fact that I want to become a good pianist. All you care about is why I told you to go home last night."

"Angie! You know I care about your music! Why, sometimes I'm so proud of you, I'm fit to burst. No one expects greater things of you than I do!"

"Oh."

Something became too much. Maybe it was the way the apple resembled a breast. Maybe it was the memory of last night. Maybe it was Angie and the half-rebelling, half-yielding light of her eyes.

Tony got up and walked towards her.

It would be a straight line between two points. There would be no deterrent this time. He would take her in his arms, and hold her as if he would die at the very moment he loosened his arms; he would

hold her as if each moment would be a prolongation of his life, as if the moment could never happen again, and only in length could the memory become permanent, as if the lean warmness of her would be his and forever, if he could only hold on, as if the moment were a flood, washing away nightmare, daydream, fantasy and fact. He would hold her to obliterate the lure of Jason Street, to rid himself once and for all of temptations and indecisions, of self-abusive nights and repentant mornings. He would hold her to right the girlish wrongs she had heaped upon him. He would hold her in his arms for love and reassurance, hold her so that if it never happened again, he need never berate himself for not having made the most of the moment...

When he was a foot away from the blue eyes and the cocked head, she rushed to the door. "Tony," she said, with a menacing snarl, "if you don't sit still and stop wandering around the room after me, I'm going to walk out this door, and when you decide to go home, just remember to lock up behind you, because I have a key. But I won't come back until you've gone!"

Tony sat down, and ground his toes into the floor. "All right," he said, doubly-spent. "I'll stay put."

Angie flopped down on the floor. "Tony, will you kindly tell me what this is all about?"

"Do I have to put it in words?"

"Certainly."

"All right then, it's the way I feel about you, Angie."

"Oh."

"Doesn't it mean anything?"

"I suppose so."

He jumped to his feet, hopefully. "You mean--?"

"Yes," she said. "I suppose it does mean something--to you, that is."

"And you?"

"Me? Right now, I want to practice, a nd besides, I'm getting hungry. It's twelve o'clock already."

"Can I take you out to eat?"

"No. And I'm not even inviting you to eat here. Apparently, you aren't hungry--couldn't even finish a measly apple!"

"Can't I stay here while you have lunch?"

"So what good would that do? No. You go home, and I'll see you some other time, only please promise me you won't follow me around the room. It makes me nervous."

"See you tonight?"

"No."

"Tomorrow night?"

"No."

"Why not tomorrow night?"

"All right."

It was hopeful. Tony became animated, making plans. "How about seven o'clock? We can go to the movies--we haven't done it for weeks. There's a picture about that composer what's-his-name? And after that, a good restaurant with dancing--and you can try to teach me to dance again. Once I've learned how, we can do quite a lot of it--it's good exercise, and I'd enjoy it, dancing with you--"

"Well don't jump so far ahead. Tomorrow night is far enough."

"Then, so long for now, Angie--and I wish you'd think about it."

"Think about what, Tony?"

"What I told you--about how I feel--"

"If I have time."

He left. When the door closed behind him, Angie returned to the piano. "C'est la vie," she told the keys. "C'est la vie."

15.

Lunchtime at Lawton's office meant young ladies disappearing into the room marked "Ladies" and strolling out, some fifteen minutes later, for an hour of absence, computed carefully from the time of entrance into the washroom. They ate in shifts, and returned promptly, except on Fridays, when they received their salary checks. On Fridays, and sometimes on Mondays, the girls tended to return from five to fifteen minutes after the hour, laden with packages. Lately, there had been fewere and fewer packages. Lawton attributed it to the high cost of living, and braced himself for requests for raises. He remembered the First President's warning of a few months back. "No raises for the girls until next Christmas, Al! We have a budget to work with. Plenty of girls on the market. You just fire the first girl who pesters you for a raise. Teach the others a lesson. They think there's a war on!"

Funny, Lawton thought, how he had gotten into the habit of thinking and referring to his boss as the "First President." Actually, there was only one President. His first and middle names were Frederick Peter. The girls in the office had fallen into the usual practice of speaking of him as "FP." After awhile, it had become "The FP" and shortly afterward, "The First President." Lawton overheard many of their conversations, and had unconsciously adopted their terminology. He was careful not to let them know it, however, and speaking to them, he referred to the First President as Mr. Caswell.

The girls were plotting a raise-request, Lawton knew. They had taken to carrying on whispered discussions among themselves on payday. Lately, Edith Boskin, the bookkeeper had been coming to him, preparatory to making up the weekly payroll, asking him if there were "any changes to be made." He always said no, and pretended that the

question was mere routine. He knew that the girls would come to some agreement as to which one of them would make the first request. They would choose some one of established seniority, perhaps Lena Osbert, his own secretary. She would probably make the first request, safe in the knowledge that she wouldn't lose her job by asking. Then, if by some miracle, the First President agreed to let Lawton raise her salary, all other girls would take turns coming to him.

Lawton could not afford to lose Lena Osbert at present. Perhaps in a few months, he could find and break in a replacement, but at present, she was efficient. So then, if she approached him for more money, how could he head her off without actually disobeying the First President's dictum about firing the girls who requested pay increases? If he, Lawton, listened to a girl's request, refused it, and said nothing to the First President, he might get into trouble. The girl might decide to carry her request to the First President directly, in which case Caswell would realize that Lawton was not following his instructions.

Out of the corner of his eye, Lawton saw Lena Osbert come out of the Ladies' Room, freshly washed and powdered, carrying her handbag, and a cellophane-covered novel from the lending library. He picked up a phone. "Get me the Delaney Shippers, please," he told the switchboard operator. While waiting, he busied himself with the papers on his desk. If Lena Osbert approached him, she would lose some courage, he knew, while waiting for him to complete a phone call.

The operator gave him his number. "Mr. Krugman, please," he said. "Lawton of Caswell Hardware calling."

Lena Osbert walked into his office, timidly. She always looked timid when she was not carrying a stenographer's pad. Lawton looked up

at her, his phone at his ear and mouth. He nodded briefly, and gestured with his free hand for her to sit down. He continued speaking into the phone:

"Mr. Krugman? This is Al Lawton of Caswell...Yes, that's right... You've received the confirmation already? Good...I want to ask you about delivery on t he drafting boards...That's good, but is it definite?...Yes, we're making some changes in that department...Thank you... Yes, thanks again...You can have him pay us a visit in about three weeks...Make it the first of the month...Fine! All right, then...Yes... Goodbye."

Lena Osbert crossed her legs, then uncrossed them, and tugged at her spun rayon skirt. She laid book and handbag on her lap, then busied herself in a search for some obscure object in the bottom of the bag. When Lawton placed the telephone back on its stand, she spoke. "Mr. Lawton," she said. "I came in to ask you something."

He nodded, solemnly. "Yes. Would you mind waiting a moment, though? I have to locate a letter."

She nodded. He took a sheaf of papers out of his bottom drawer, and proceeded to inspect each sheet carefully. When he was about halfway down the pile, he began to speak to her as he searched. "The situation is getting tight," he said with a sigh. "The same old cycle--war and peace, prosperity and depression." He went on examining the papers, separating them into piles as he finished each sheet. "Frankly," he said in a confidential tone, "I wouldn't even bother looking for this letter if one of our executives hadn't made a special request. No names mentioned, of course. It seems that Mr--this executive--has a niece who has just graduated from a business college."

Lena Osbert nodded and smiled, not yet quite sure of what he was talking about. She held her book and handbag firmly in her lap.

Lawton looked up briefly, smiled in a friendly fashion, and continued sorting the papers. "This letter I'm looking for," he said. "It's from the niece of the man I mentioned. It seems he's her favorite uncle. The letter came here a few weeks ago. The girl wanted a job, and at the time I received the letter, I didn't know she was related to anyone here. Naturally, I paid no attention to the letter at the time."

He removed a gold-finished mechanical pencil from his coat pocket, and proceeded to put check marks on the papers. Lena Osbert glanced down at her wrist-watch, very inconspicuously, hoping he would not notice.

He noticed. "Sorry to keep you from your lunch," he said. "I'll have this cleared up in another minute or so. When Mr...that is, when an executive makes a personal request for special attention to his niece, I have no choice but to respect his wishes."

Lena Osbert nodded again, and tried to smile. She moistened her lips. "I..." she said.

"Yes?" Lawton asked. "What was it you wanted to see me about?" In answer, she parted her lips.

He didn't wait for her to speak. "Ah," he said. "Here's the letter!" He held it up, to read it more carefully. "Hmmm..." he said. "She seems to have a rather sound background, but you can never tell about these things. Experience is the most important factor." He read further. "Hmmmm..." he said.

Lena Osbert stood up. It isn't really important, Mr. Lawton--what I was going to ask you. I'll wait until you aren't busy." She tucked her handbag under her arm, while Lawton looked down at the letter, apparently lost in the text. "Very well, Miss Osbert," he said. "You can feel free to speak to me any time you choose," he said, and picked

up the telephone. Lena Osbert walked out, smiling politely, and returned to the Ladies' Room. After about ten minutes, all four girls of Lena's lunch-shift emerged together, whispering. They smiled uniformly at Lawton as they passed his desk. He smiled back at them, pleasantly, detachedly. As soon as he heard them leave the building, he shuffled together the pile of papers on his desk, and tossed them loosely into the bottom drawer.

That was that for Lena Osbert's raise. Neat, Lawton, neat, he doled himself a compliment, wondering idly if any of the company's executives had any miscellaneous nieces with business experience.

...

He checked his watch. He would give the girls another twenty minutes in which to finish lunching at Max's Restaurant, their standard eating-place, and then he would go out to eat. If he were careful of his timing, he could be sure that they would have left Max's for their lunchtime stroll by the time he arrived.

He pushed papers around on his desks, not concentrating. He considered this half-hour as part of his lunch time. It never took him more than a half-hour to eat. Unlike the girls, he preferred his idle period to precede, not follow digestion.

The summer was past its mid-way. That was good, he mused. In a few weeks, his friends would start their trek back to the city. His social life would pick up again. No more of this wondering how to kill a Saturday night, or a Saturday afternoon, for that matter. Look at this past weekend! That idiotic park-sitting--

It hadn't been bad, though--the rowing. The kid, Angie, had been appealingly sweet, almost perfect for a summer afternoon on a park lake. Not a bad-looking kid, either. Give her some polish and a less unpredictable

nature, and he'd be proud to call her a kid-sister, not that he needed a kid-sister. As it was, she was no one to be ashamed of. A bit bombastic, of course, although that was only something he sensed, rather than knew directly. With him, she seemed restrained. She was probably somewhat in awe of him. That could not be helped, and besides, who wanted to help it? She treated him the way he should be treated.

But unpredictable. Very much so. Why the tears without provocation? Had he said anything to upset her? He thought back. They had sat in the boat and discussed poetry. She had read aloud from her anthology. What had they talked about on that diminutive grass-patch she had called an island? He remembered saying something about judging time by smoking. They had tossed that around for a line or two. Then--ah, that was it! She had mentioned Sandy, and he had felt uncomfortable about it, and had said something jokingly about waiting for her to grow up, the kid Angie, that was.

Good Lord! The kid had a crush on him--that was it! He groaned silently, smiling a half-smile. Certainly that was it--it explained everything--the careful way she had taken care of him the late-spring night he was drunk, her "chance" meetings with him, the time he had given her the lift in his car and she had sat there rigidly all the way. And more to it than that, even more! The way she had discussed that young boyfriend of hers, calling him, "just a friend" had been an ill-concealed way of telling him that she was unattached.

Good Lord! She was only a child! How old was it that she'd said she was? Fifteen? Seventeen? Seventeen. How could he handle the situation? Worse still, she lived in the neighborhood of the office, and chances were she'd run into him again. Suppose that boyfriend of hers started considering him a rival? Kids had such wild imaginations.

He'd have to put the lad at ease. Well, that wouldn't be too difficult. He had handled worse situations. This Lena Osbert business, this morning--Lena Osbert was at least twenty-six, and considerably less naive than Angie. He had been able to handle her little problem. So what if the Angie-problem was of a slightly different nature? It was only a situation, that's all, a situation, and that was something he was capable of handling. A kid was a kid until she hit twenty-eight, and then she became a Sandy. No, that wasn't exactly a fair judgment of women. This crush of Angie's--nothing important, really, nothing to waste time on.

He would dispose of it masterfully; he would simply ignore the girl as much as possible. At any rate, the subject was boring.

His thoughts rambled. It struck him that the social season would be rather dull this year. Same old faces, resort-tanned, plump, eager for good jokes.

He would have to remember to keep enough scotch around for the Dunstans. Then, there were the Gordsons, Lon and Georgia, and the Clancy fellow who always trailed around after them. There were more. He enumerated them as if they were sheep being counted, in a mental monotone. He might as well start thinking about the season now, and planning. He did so, detail after detail--he should remember to buy chrome-polish for the cocktail shaker--should he buy a new one?--no, better not--J.C. Douglas had given him the old one, and J.C. was an important contact, especially now that he was reorganizing his company. With expansion, and new clients, J. C. might be dropping up more often to the apartment. Look-see what last year's encouragement had earned him--a cocktail shaker from J.C. All right, he'd buy chrome-polish. What else? The First President's birthday was in September.

It wouldn't be too early for Lawton to put in an order for the silver-backed military brushes he would give him for a present. Not too early, considering time to have his initials engraved. The First President had a mania for initials, loved having them scratched on everything he owned, everything scratchable. His latest touch of individuality--the monogrammed shirts--that was rather in the nature of overdoing things.

The phone rang. "No," Lawton said into the mouthpiece, "tell them I'm not in. I'm out to lunch."

He returned to his plans. He would have to phone Timothy Brinkett about the Labor Day weekend. No, he had better wait with that. B rinkett might not like to have the weekend mentioned so long ahead of time. It might be better to wait until about a week or ten days before Labor Day, and fix it so he could have a legitimate excuse to phone Brinkett. He might arrange to have a little party in the apartment near the end of August, to give the season an early start, and fix himself permanently into the picture.

He planned on and on, but the thought of Sandy had come into the picture, like a little pebble of confusion, untouched by the cascade of future events, and remaining to pierce his toe, the more he tried to kick it away.

He looked at his watch. He could leave the office now. The First President never went out until one-thirty, and the office would be covered. Lawton went to the washroom, and left quickly. He wasn't lunching with anyone today; no sense going to much trouble. If he spent too much time browsing over the sink, he might start contemplating that phone-call to Sandy, and wouldn't it be just what he deserved if

that roommate of hers got on the phone again--Jean, or Joan or whatever her name was.

At the foot of the stairs, he told the switchboard operator that he would be back in about twenty-five minutes. "If Mr. Oker phones, tell him I'll call him back at three," he added, walking out of the front door. As soon as he closed the door, the switchboard operator resumed the reading of Murder at Nine, confident that he had not seen her with the book when he came down the stairs.

Lawton blinked with annoyance at the sunlight. He sweated, even with his lightweight shirt, short-sleeved, and the "scientifically-woven" summerweight suit. No wonder that switchboard operator sat there reading mystery novels all day, he thought. It was probably damned hot in her cubicle. Dumb kid--the way she made such a fetish of hiding the book everytime he came down the stairs. What did he care if she read, so long as she handled the calls adequately? Well then, she probably thought he was the First President coming downstairs, not him. Maybe he would contrive to put her mind at ease some day. The girls upstairs--his office staff--they had to be kept at a slightly-frightened, all right, slightly-awed distance, but as for the operator, the more comfortable she was with him, the easier it was for him to get faster service, sometimes faster than the First President. The operator liked him better than the F.P. He would keep it that way.

And now, lunch. He would have to eat in that filthy, gut-rotting, so-called "Restaurant" again. The summer was a plague, no two ways about it.

....

Max, of Max's Restaurant, rubbed his hands on his apron, and sighed. Those office girls had gone away, which both saddened and pleased him. They were pretty to look at, but they talked like magpies, and ate finickly. Today, all three of them had sent back their sandwiches, asking for more mayonnaise. Then, that one they called Lena had sent back her plate, saying that sour pickle made her nauseous in the summer, and could she have a slice of tomato instead? The office girls never tipped either. Max didn't mind for himself because it was his own restaurant, and owners don't get tipped, but it didn't look right when the hired counterman got no tips. Some of the countermen that the Union sent down didn't like to wait tables. No tips made it worse yet.

"Ach!" It was hard for a man to do things High Class. If maybe more High Class people came in, it would be better for business. "Ach!" Max went to the supply-closet, and started to count soup cans.

Lawton walked into the restaurant. He sat down, opened his newspaper, and might have remained there unnotice had not Max personally seen him. Max beamed, left the supply-closet, and came running over. Max, who played favorites, liked Mr. Lawton more than all his other favorites. He declared frequently that a business executive, such as Mr. Lawton, gave the eating-house a "real High Class appearance." Max often said that he liked "refined" men, and wasn't Mr. Lawton a refined man? "Look," Max would tell his wife, "look, you should see the way he reads the stock market page every day!"

Max towered over the seated Lawton. "Whatcha wanna eat today?" he asked. "We got extra-good lamb stew." Lawton shook his head, and said he would like a salad.

"A salad?" Max queried. "Yes," answered Lawton, adding, "an egg

salad, with white bread on the side. No butter, please. I'll have coffee without sugar, and pie--no, make it Danish pastry, if you have any." He lit a cigarette and returned to the stock market listings.

"Yes,Mr. Lawton," stammered Max. "I go make."

This was something. Max had been in the restaurant business for twenty-five years. By all the laws of averages, he should have known about salads, but somehow he didn't. Perhaps if he had worked as a watier in someone else's restaurant, he would have found out about things like salads. Max, however, had always owned his own restaurant. Schoolteachers? They were all women, Max was convinced. They only ate dainty sandwiches. For the schoolteachers, Max had purchased mayonnaise. For them, he had learned to cut sandwiches in three parts. "Hey--in old country, men would eat sandwiches not cut--and in two bites. Only in old country, no sandwiches. That's American only. Maybe in England too. They don't eat right over there, either," Max told Louie, his waiter.

For the schoolteachers, Max folded the paper napkins "real small." He had once tried serving toothpicks, one on each napkin. Miss Gibbons, one of his steady teacher customers, had looked aghast at the toothpick. Max, offended, had immediately withdrawn this extra service. He had talked about it, bitterly, for a week afterwards. "Maybe they don't like the toothpicks because they're made from wood. So let them pick their teeth with needles--even make holes!" He spoke with bravado, but he was hurt. Max, for the schoolteachers, had instituted all kinds of little services. Proper cutting of sandwiches had become an obsession with him. After trying the third-cut sandwiches, he had decided to improve them. He cut off the crusts and cut each sandwich into four parts. Once, he had tried six parts. "Real dainty!" he had thought, but later, hearing the muffled giggles of the schoolteachers, he sensed

that he had failed. "Maybe I make the sandwich pieces too small," he reasoned to himself. "I better stick to three pieces." Max was hurt, but it wasn't a bad hurt, not so bad as the toothpick insult.

Now therewas a new hurdle to jump. Max had never made a salad for anyone. No one had asked him for a salad before. How was he supposed to know what a salad was?

After Lawton had made his request, Max retreated to the tiny kitchen. "Louie," he asked his waiter, his countryman, and friend, "Louie, what's a salad? I mean, Louie, what you supposed to put in a salad?" Louie scowled, and wiped his hands on a towel. Both Louie andMax always wiped their hands before starting to think about anything.

Louie thought he knew the anser. "You put all kinds vegetables in it--cold vegetables, I think, like lettuce, tomatoes, celery. And other green vegetables you put in--whatever we got in the icebox."

Max was still perplexed. "He wants an egg salad? What kind eggs I put in?"

"Who you making it for?"

"Mr. Lawton."

"Oh, him. He's too fancy."

"Tell me what kind eggs I should use."

"Hard-boiled eggs."

"How many?"

"I don't know--two or three maybe. I don't know everything. This is supposed to be your business."

"Louie, don't get nasty. I only ask you simple question."

"So I give you simple answer."

"O.K. I go make."

Twenty minutes later, Max placed a well-filled platter in front of Mr. Lawton, who, for all his self-composure, grinned. On the platter were three hard-boiled eggs, snug in their shells, a half-head of lettuce, one large tomato, unsliced, several slices of raw onion, and two heaping tablespoonsful of hot green peas. Riding atop all this were french-fried potatoes.

Lawton stared. Max was worried. "Maybe you want tuna-fish on here? We got good tuna-fish. Maybe some more tomato?" He was anxious to please. "I get you mayonnaise, maybe. I forget. I'm sorry!"

"No," Lawton said. "Nothing else, please. This will do, thank you." Max was relieved. "I go get you the coffee," he said, "and no sugar!"

"Yes, thank you, and I think I'll skip the Danish pastry."

"O.K. I go get the coffee."

Max rushed happily into the kitchen. "He like the salad!" he said with pride. "Hey, Louie, you know something? Between you and me--I got some good restaurant. Real High Class!"

....

16.

Angie saw Lawton leave Max's Restaurant and head back to his office. She half-a-block away, taking sudden refuge in the entranceway of a lingerie store, watching him march quickly back to his office. His lunch-hour seemed to be over; there was nothing she could do about that. It was too late for her to accidentally bump into him--

It was wrong! She had been cheated! The elevators in her stomach halted between floors. There was a lurching thud in her abdomen, and then nothing, only a terrible vacuum.

It was Tony's fault! If Tony hadn't ruined her morning chasing her all around the room, she might have been able to be in Max's before Lawton arrived. Then, when he came in, he would sit down and have lunch with her. Tony had spoiled that. He hadn't left until twelve o'clock, noon! Then, Angie had tried to dress rapidly, changing from slacks into skirt and blouse, similar to the Saturday afternoon costume. By the time she had finished, her hair showed the need of another combing. Combing had led to brushing, brushing to more combing in order to flatten down the electrified-looking hair. After that, she had washed her hair again, and noticing the ever-present torn cuticle, she had tried to smooth its rough surface with vaseline. She had had some success with the thumb cuticle, and it had been encouraging. Therefore, she had set about smoothing the other cuticles. Then, she had looked into her slacks' pocket to see how much money she had. Ten cents, every penny counted.

She had been hungry, and ten cents in Max's Restaurant would have meant nothing more than a cup of coffee, or a glass of milk, or soda pop. If she had a sandwich at Max's, and ran into Lawton, as she was contriving to do, Lawton would probably insist upon paying for her food,

but she wasn't looking for Lawton, yes, Al, for that reason! It would be better if she went to Max's just for a glass of milk. No, a cup of coffee--iced, if he had it--would look more sophisticated. But she would become nauseous drinking coffee on an empty stomach, and after all, she only had ten cents--

So she had eaten at home. Since she always read while she ate, she had started a story with her sandwich, and the story had outlasted the bread. The story had been exciting, demanding that it be finished; Angie had heeded the call.

It had been twenty-five minutes after one o'clock when she had closed the apartment door behind her, and now it was one-thirty. Lawton was just entering his office, and all was lost, for the day at least.

She turned sadly home, attributed her bad luck to bad luck, changed her clothes, and returned to the piano. She would work away the disappoint - ment, pretend it had never happened. After all, her Music School lessons were on Tuesdays. It might be intelligent for her to spend the rest of the ruined afternoon practicing, but she couldn't concentrate. No good. It was no good.

She went to the kitchen, and ate another sandwich, butter and peanut butter, detestably dry, but how to wet it? She found a cucumber wrapped in wax paper, cut several slices, and added them to the sandwich, skin and all. Better. Then, because the peanut butter was sticking to her teeth and she found herself unable to suck out the particles, she went to the bathroom and brushed her teeth for the third time that day. She snarled at herself in the mirror over the sink, twisting her mouth first to the right, then to the left. Her teeth looked clean, and very white. That was partly because she was perspiring, she concluded. She didn't know why, but when there was sweat on her face, her teeth looked good, and

the whites of her eyes shone very white. Such was now.

She sat on the rim of the bathtub and wondered if Mr. Lawton liked her physical appearance. What was it he had said? They had similar skin-colorings. Lovely, lovely, more lovely, most. He was a handsome man, but what if he weren't? He was, of course, but even if not, his remark would have pleased her, she knew. It meant that he had really noticed the way she looked. He couldn't have made a comparison if he hadn't looked at her closely, could he? She wondered if he had seen the torn cuticle when they had been out in the rowboat. Idiot that she was! Why had she kept it fidgeting right in front of him? He couldn't have helped but see it! She resolved to take care of fingernails in the future, better care, so that if Mr. Lawton saw them accidentally, there would be nothing bad to see.

And another thing--the hair-combing business. She would manage to brush her hair every night, no exceptions, none whatsoever! There was no telling when a man might--well, when a man might feel sort of impelled to touch a woman's hair, casually maybe, the way Tony sometimes did. But Tony knew nothing; he liked her hair any old way. Mr. Lawton was different (what should she call him--Mr. Lawton? Lawton? Al?), different from Tony. That picture of a woman in his wallet--Sandy he had called her--showed a well-groomed person. Men really liked that, women like that, women who took pains to keep their hair smooth, with all the loose ends in pat place. Tony always went around telling her that he liked her no matter how she looked. "You're cute when you're a street-gamin, too," Tony had said, but what did he know? He was only a boy, fresh out of high school. She would have to judge herself by standards higher than that!

She returned to the piano. Salvage the day. Do something concrete.

Scratching her head, she slipped off her shoes, tugged the stool out from under the piano, deposited her knees at the sides of the instrument, and proceeded with a left-hand improvisation. Then came a switch in feet position, and a take-off with her right hand. Next, an apple was sought for and found, eaten core and all. Next, the volume of Shakespeare's Complete Works attracted her. A few min utes later, Angie, momentarily forgetting Sibelius' music, tried to set new music to "Come Away Death ". The sombre notes were unsatisfactory. Angie forsook the notion of a second's life, that of putting her new composition on music-paper. She had thought it would be something she could show Lawton.

How about trying to play blues music? The mood was right, not that she was sickeningly blue, but the lazy tempo fitted the warm day. The music was sort of--well, introspective, and that was how she felt. Not sad, but sort of introspective, sort of philosophic, c'est la vie and all that. She tried a few notes. Not too bad, but if she had some blues music on sheets, it might be easier, for a beginning.

The afternoon was beginning to drag. Angie wished someone would come in and talk to her, nobody in particular, even Tony might do. She tried to discipline herself for a few minutes. She soberly returned to her assigned music, but it wasn't right for the mood. Blues were better, even if she wasn't blue, no, not even if, because if she were blue, playing the blues would be too much. She had tried it once, right before high school finals, senior year, and the result had been a girl on the verge of tears. Back there on the island with Mr. Lawton, all right, just plain Lawton, she had heard a sort of blues refrain inside of herself, and maybe that had helped bring on the tears.

There was a knock on the door. Angie went to open it, and admitted Jonah who walked in wearing dungarees and a cigarette. "Hi, Tart," he said, with a backward thrust of his head. "Too damned hot to work today, so I took a break."

"Won't your boss be angry?"

"Nope. He won't get back to the shop until about five-dirty."

"Five what?"

"Five-dirty. You know--five-thirty."

"Oh."

"Don't tell me you're practicing now. I caught the sound of the blues when I was coming in."

Angie shrugged her shoulders. "I was just playing around. Sometimes I think I don't know what blues music is made of."

"I know," Jonah said. "It's the only stuff I understand. You know--an uncultured brute like me. I don't know the fancy stuff--symphony music--like Tony does. But blues is right up my alley. Ask me anything you d on't know."

"There isn't anything specific I want to know. It's just the whole thing."

"Give, kid--what's eating you?"

"Nothing's bothering me. I was just thinking that music is so very much all by itself, maybe all of life, right on the page and in the piano. I suppose it can't be defined very easily, not in a sentence at least."

"Sure, Tart, I know."

Angie didn't stop to complain about being called Tart. "See, Jonah," she said. "Blues mean something to me, a sort of lament, like tears coming out on a page of notes, but it isn't sad, somehow, not the way

real life is, and on the other hand, it's worse than real life. Do you know what I'm talking about?"

Jonah snuffed his cigarette, and sat down, leaning backwards in a straight-backed chair. "Looka here, Tart, sure I know what you're talking about. Like I said--when it comes to strictly-culture music, I don't know a damn, and that's O.K. with me. But when it comes to blues, you're talking to the guy who's awake. The trouble with you, little girl, is that you never gave me half a chance. It's always been Tony with you."

"Not it hasn't. But tell me about blues. I mean, what do you think it is?"

"Nope. I'd rather not. I sound kind of soupy when I try to give out with stuff like that."

"I won't tell anyone."

"Not even Tony?"

"Of course not! What do you think--that I tell him everything?"

"How should I know?"

"Well, I don't. Come on, Jonah--tell me what you think the blues are all about."

Jonah lit another cigarette and puffed a few times. "It's like this, Tart," he said. "Blues is blues, belongs to us, you, me, anybody who gives a damn, Negro, White man, anybody. Like you said, it's something of a lament. We all have to make with a wail once in a while, lament, maybe cry a little, sometimes a lot. And sometimes, if we happen to be built that way, we get hard about the tears, so we go through the song like as if we were strutting, because we don't want people to see we got bruises under the strut. So we shrug our shoulders, like you do sometimes, and slick back the hair, put on a nice, big grin like as if the world's pink and sunny, and we strut. No slopping around, no

getting out of step, and hell--no showing that you feel like you just worked a full twenty-four hours with no break for lunch, and no showing the wail--just the strut."

Angie broke in. "Jonah, did you ever feel like there was something heavy in you--like an albatross around your heart, or something?"

"Sure, Tart," Jonah answered. "We all do, I guess. But it's like I said. Sometimes the blues don't come out that way. The lament, like you called it, well, it's there, and I'd be a heck of a bad liar if I didn't say we all felt it sometimes, but it's gotta be kept inside. The wail, the tears, they come out in the way you strut, sort of slow and even, keeping the heat down under. No big hot-ziggetty gleam in the eyes, and maybe even a couple of circles under it. And you know something, Tart, you don't sing when you strut that way. If it's anything, it's a whistle, cool and low--"

Angie sat, enrapt, waiting for him to go on. He flipped an ash, and continued. "And that's all of us, Tart m'girl--all of us can feel that way, and the way it hits us is sometimes pretty much the same for every guy, maybe more for some than others, but every guy, they tell me, has to get away by himself sometimes, and go drink some coffee or maybe stronger, something to wash down the lump in his throat--and strut it off, later."

Jonah stopped, and looked at Angie with a slightly impish grin. "It's all your fault, baby, all my spouting. You talked me into it."

"I'm glad I did, Jonah. I've never heard you talk like this before. It's almost beautiful. I guess I never really understood blues music before. I really liked the way you told it."

"Stop kidding me," Jonah interrupted. "You know I can't talk fancy like Tony, and sometimes you. I'm just a crude character, no

poetry, just the solid things of life, like women." He laughed, and ran his fingers through his hair. With his hands clasped around the back of his neck, he yawned. "Pay it no mind, Tart," he said. "No offense to present company, but I've been short on sleep lately."

"Oh," Angie said, sympathetically. "Why don't you go home and sleep for a while? Take a nap. What time are you going back to the shop?"

"Five-ten or thereabouts, in time to get in before the boss comes back. Nope, I don't feel like taking any naps. I like gassing around with you. You know what I'm talking about, even if you are woozy in the head half the time."

"Well, thanks!"

"Think nothing of it, Tart, m'girl. Now you tell me something."

"What?"

"What's the idea of getting my pal Tony-boy all upset last night? He was a wreck after you ditched us. Nothing bothers me, so it's strictly Tony-boy I'm talking about."

"I didn't mean to upset him. I just felt tired."

"Don't give me that hooey."

"Not hooey!"

"You weren't any more tired last night than you are now, and you look fine now."

"So?"

"So give!"

"But it wasn't anything!".

"Like I told you before, I know the lay of the land. What's up?"

"If you know what's up, what's there for me to tell you?"

"Dames! Looka here, Tart--Tony's maybe too serious, but he's my pal, and so are you, and I kind of got the idea that maybe someday you

and him might hook up together. So when you start blowing off and getting into tantrums, your old Uncle Jonah gets worried, see?"

Angie couldn't think of an answer. Tony seemed so far away and never-was. Jonah went on. "Tart, it hits me that there's more to this than hits the surface. I can kind of see what's wrong--you and Tony are both younger than I am--"

"A few months, big shot!"

"That's a few months more than you have nicked off, and Tony too. So maybe I can see things clearer than you, even without the culture-culture."

Angie grew pensive, and tried to explain. "Look, Jonah--Tony's young, you're young, I'm young, we're all three of us friends, and I don't really understand why you're making all this fuss just because I didn't feel like spending the rest of the evening talking; I just wasn't in the mood. Besides, I was tired. I told you all this before."

"Just tired, Tart?"

"That was most of it."

"Part maybe, not most."

"So what else, Jonah?"

Jonah whistled between his teeth. "Looka here, baby, if you don't feel like talking to Uncle Jonah, I'll let it ride for now, but I'm telling you that if you feel like giving out with the info, you got an audience, namely me."

"Let's talk about something else. What time is it anyway?"

"Kicking around four o'clock. I got another hour to kill."

"That's complimentary!"

"Sorry kid, I didn't mean it that way." He guffawed. "Hey, now looka here, Tart--don't go putting me in the wrong, shoe on the other foot and all that--I came around here to ask you if anything's eating you

because I'm a little worried about Tony-boy. He's been acting queer lately. If you can keep a secret, I'll tell you something: He doesn't see any other women except you."

"That's no secret," Angie said. "He's made that clear to me a long time ago."

Jonah rolled his cigarette around between his lips, squinting at it with one eye. "You don't understand me, Tart. I mean no women, nohow!"

"That's what you said before," Angie answered.

He picked a cigarette crumb from his underlip. "O.K. baby, let's skip it."

Angie took off one of her shoes and scratched her big toe. "Your sunburn's lasting, I notice," she said to Jonah. "Sure enough!" he agreed.

"Where did you get it?" she asked.

"Same place as you."

"What?"

"You heard me."

"You mean--in the park?"

"Special part of the park!"

"The lake?"

"Sure enough!"

"When?"

"Same time as you."

She caught his eye, and held it. "Did you see me?" she asked, softly. He nodded.

"With Mr. Lawton?" she asked.

"That his name?"

"Yes."

"I saw him."

Angie went into a hasty explanation of how she had found Mr. Lawton sitting on a bench, cooling off, how they had talked for a while, then gone rowing. She omitted the part about the island.

"Is that all?" Jonah asked when she was finished. "Certainly," she said.

Jonah shook his head, sucking at his upper lip. "What about the part where he kissed you?"

"It was only on the cheek, and anyway, it wasn't what you think."

"I bet Tony-boy never got that far."

"It's different."

"Sure must be."

"Jonah!"

"Don't get scared, kid; I won't tell Tony."

"Promise?"

He nodded, making the cross-sign on his heart. Seeing it, Angie smiled. Jonah laughed heartily, and added, verbally, "Hope to die!"

"You're O.K., Jonah," Angie said.

"Check! I always told you I was."

"And you won't feel bad about Tony? Really, I think it's just that he's temperamental, sometimes, and I know you're rather concerned with how he reacts to things. I mean, don't let this make you feel as if something is going on behind Tony's back, because it isn't that kind of thing at all with Mr. Lawton, not at all. It's just that we went rowing together, and I explained to you how it happened already, and it's nothing more than that, because I didn't leave out anything, but I'm not telling Tony, and you promised you wouldn't either, because I don't think Tony would understand, and we don't want to upset him."

"I saw him."

Angie went into a hasty explanation of how she had found Mr. Lawton sitting on a bench, cooling off, how they had talked for a while, then gone rowing. She omitted the part about the island.

"Is that all?" Jonah asked when she was finished. "Certainly," she said.

Jonah shook his head, sucking at his upper lip. "What about the part where he kissed you?"

"It was only on the cheek, and anyway, it wasn't what you think."

"I bet Tony-boy never got that far."

"It's different."

"Sure must be."

"Jonah!"

"Don't get scared. Nick: I won't tell Tony."

"Promise?"

He nodded, making the cross-sign on his heart. Seeing it, Angie smiled. Jonah laughed heartily, and added, verbally, "Hope to die!"

"You're O.K., Jonah," Angie said.

"Check: I always told you I was."

"And you won't feel bad about Tony? Really, I think it's just that he's temperamental, sometimes, and I know you're rather concerned with how he reacts to things. I mean, don't let this make you feel as if something is going on behind Tony's back, because it isn't that kind of thing at all with Mr. Lawton, not at all. It's just that we went rowing together, and I explained to you how it happened already, and it's nothing more than that, because I didn't leave out anything, but I'm not telling Tony, and you promised you wouldn't either, because I don't think Tony would understand, and we don't want to upset him."

Jonah whistled again. "Whew," he said, "all in one breath! Cool off, baby. I said I wouldn't tell Tony-boy."

"Thanks, Jonah."

"Right!"

Jonah looked at his watch, noting that it was almost five o'clock. "That does it," he said. "I'd better hop back to work, strictly on the double. Sure you know about the blues, now?"

"Sure," Angie said. "And if there's any more I don't understand, I'll ask you next time we all get together."

At the door, he lit another cigarette. "One more thing," he said.

"What?"

"I'd kind of like you for myself, Tart."

"Oh."

"Well, don't worry about it. We'll gas around about it sometime. Right now, I have to hop off."

"So long, Jonah--and thanks!"

"What for?"

"The hope-to-die."

"Think nothing of it, babe. Be seeing you."

He closed the door with a bang, leaving a trail of cigarette smoke behind him. Angie put the blues improvisations aside, and practiced exercises until Mamma came home.

17.

"During the summer," the clerk at the Music School Registration Office had said to Angie, "your lessons will be on Tuesdays, at 10:30, in room 322."

Once having entered the building, after seeing the red-bricked, tarnished-looking facade, once having climbed to the third floor, Angie did not need her eyes to find the room. She had only to walk through the corridors, with ears receptive to the cacaphony bulging through the oak doors. The first room was not hers. In it were the low growls of the bass violin. Nor was the second room numbered 322. Janey Leotus was in there. The chamber housed the agony of a violin in the hands of a new student. Angie knew how bad a new student could sound. She paused for an instant, her face screwed up in mock pain. She felt sorry for the room itself, for the door that had led in many musicians, many of them competent, and now had to put up with Janey Leotus. The door could use some sort of padding, insulation against skidded slides, inaccurate half-tones, double-stops that missed their marks, and scratched, rosin-scraped, against the strings. Angie could imagine what Janey's violin looked like when she put it back in its purple imitation-velvet-lined case. The poor fiddle was probably exhausted for the night from its hours of torment. Angie actually felt sorry for it. "Poor fiddle," she mused. "It's probably so tired that it doesn't even care that its strings haven't been loosened, as they should be, and that the bow-hairs are still taut, and its poor fiddle-belly is covered with sticky rosin dust."

A head poked out of the doorway next to Janey Leotus' practice-room. A pair of eyes darted with fear, and a low "Psst!" softly hissed through

the hall.

"Angie, c'm'ere please," the hisser said. The hisser's head poked out puppy-fashion, showing that head as belonging to a young girl, and covered with the tight curls of a cheap permanent.

Angie did not remember her name, but recognized her as a neighbor. "What's the matter?" she asked the curly-top."You in trouble?"

"It's this," the curly-top explained. "My sister Janey is in the next room playin' on her violin, in there. I gotta have someplace to write letters in because my old man said I gotta stop writin' to the boys in the Navy when I don't even know them too good (he says), and anyway, he says the war is over and I shouldn' be writin' to them no more. So I found this here room to write in, only I'm afraid someone's gonna get nasty and come in here, if it's their room by rights, onaccount of it ain't my room by rights. So couldya tell me if this room's yours or anyone else's thatcha know? I only need another hour, but I jist gotta write to my boyfriend, or he'll think I don't wanna go steady anytime he's in no more, and if my old man catches me writin' letters, he says he'll send out a secret 'nonymous letter to my boyfriends commandin' officer, and get my boyfriend thrown outa the Navy, and if he ever did that, my boyfriend'd kill me for sure!"

The girl paused, wide-eyed, anxious for an answer.

Angie suddenly felt like an old lady. "How old are you?" she asked the girl. "Seventeen," was the answer. "No, that's wrong," she corrected herself. "You're a girl, not a feller, so I can tell you my real age. I'm fourteen, goin' on fifteen."

"How old's your boyfriend?" Angie a sked.

"Twenty-four and a half, goin' on twenty-five, and he's so handsome! He comes from Texas. A genuwine cowboy!"

Angie bent closer, whispering. "I think you'll be safe here. So far as I know, nobody has the room reserved until at least two o'clock. You'll be all right."

The other girl smiled grateful dimples into her face. Her close-curled head receded into the room. The last Angie saw of her was her trembling hand, pulling the door shut.

Angie paraded on down the corridor. "She thinks she has troubles!" she laughed. "Wait until she gets as old as I am!"

Miss Arliss, a student-teacher of voice and ear-training, turned a corner at the far end of the hall, and headed towards Angie. When they were face to face, they greeted each other as two equals, smiling mildly. Angie regarded Miss Arliss as "only a student-teacher," no one to be feared. Miss Arliss, on the other hand, thought of Angie as "more than just a student" because Angie had been associated with the Music School long before Miss Arliss had been given her current appointment. Now, Miss Arliss, blonde and pretty in what Angie called a "washed-away way," smiled demurely. "Angie," she began, in a slightly troubled voice, despite the smile, "I'm at a loss. I'm expecting a pupil at 10:30 and we are without a room! That fearfully inefficient office downstairs!"

"That's too bad," said Angie. "Maybe I can help you."

"Oh, could you?" Miss Arliss asked, giving Angie an I-trust-you stare. Angie winced. She had always thought Miss Arliss was so much of a sissy that she pulled that helpless routine even in front of girls. She made Angie nervous. Tony and Jonah had both met her at one of the student recitals. Tony had barely glanced at her, but Jonah had muttered between his teeth, "Cute stuff!" Usually, Angie paid no attention to her, but this was something of a head-on collision.

Miss Arliss waited to be led out of her difficulty. Angie came to the rescue. "It isn't really a tragedy," she said, with an air of efficiency. "Just try that room down there, on the right-hand side. The last room before you turn the corridor." She pointed in the direction away from the room in which Janey Leotus' kid-sister was composing literary offerings for her boyfriend.

Miss Arliss smiled rainbows on Angie, with the air of someone who has just beenrescued from a burning skyscraper. "Oh, thank you so much!" she cooed. "And are you certain the room is not occupied?"

Angie shrugged her shoulders. "Pretty sure," she answered.

Miss Arliss blew her a kiss, and left,m urmuring, "Thank you, thank you." Angie marched on, thinking "C'est la vie!"

A door opened, behind Angie. The curly-top peeked out again.

"Psst, Angie!"

"What's the matter now?"

"I heardya talkin' to somebody. Is she comin' here, in my room?"

"No. Don't worry. I sent her down the hall. You're safe."

"Gee! I was so scared! Like a rabbit!"

"I told you it was all right. Just lock the door from the inside, and you'll be all right."

"Ya sure?"

"I said I was sure. Anyway, it's summer, and this place is pretty much empty now. At least half the rooms on the floor aren't being used. I told you you're safe!"

"But I got so scared when I heardya talkin' to somebody. Honestly, my breath stopped. Here, feel my heart-beat. It's still bangin' away like crazy!"

"You shouldn't get frightened so easily. What will you do when you grow up and have real troubles?"

"Yer kiddin'! I couldn' be much worse off than what I got now, with my old man and his ideas about the Navy. You should know the troubles I got at home! My sister Janey gets away with everythin', but all I gotta do is even lift a finger and my old man goes off his nut!"

"Did he ever meet your sailor?"

"Oh, no! I ain't allowed to have dates. My old man should only know about Jimsy and me goin' steady! We been steadies for three months already, and if my old man ever found out, he'd have a hemorrhage!"

"I thought your boyfriend was in the Navy."

"Yeah, he's in the Navy, but we're steadies. Didya ever go out with a sailor?"

"No."

"Yer sure missin' something'!"

"Why?"

"They're sharp!"

"Oh."

"That's why I write to Jimsy every chanct I get. I'm scared another girl'll get him if I don't keep him posted up."

"Say--doesn't your father see the letters he send you?"

"Ha! That's a sure laugh! Don'tya think I figgered that out myself? Jimsy writes to me care of my girlfriend's house and her old man don't know what's goin' on anyhow, he's such a lame-brain!"

"Oh. Well, I have to take a lesson now. Goodbye for now, and don't worry so much. You're safe."

"Gee, thanks, Angie! Yer real swell!"

Angie started to walk away.

"Psst!"

"What's the matter now?"

"I jist wanted to askya how come ya never come over to our house? Y'c'n play music with my sister Janey. She plays the violin."

"Yes, I know."

"Why dontya come over some night and play me the piano? I ain't never heard."

"O.K. I'll come over some night."

"Yeah. You play piano and Janey plays violin and then we c'n talk some more about the boyfriend and the Navy. Boy, is he somethin'!"

"O.K.--and goodbye for now."

"Goodbye, Angie, and I hope I c'n do the same for you sometime!"

The door closed again. As soon as Angie heard the click of the inside lock, she hastened away. Now, if she could manage to get to her room before there were other interruptions, she might manage getting a five-minute warmup before her teacher arrived. Miss Baylor, her teacher, was always three to five minutes late anyway, but starting time did not matter because Miss Baylor never observed the formal end of the hour. If today's lesson ran the customary course, Angie could not expect to leave the building before noon. And afterwards? It would be impossible to try to get to Max's Restaurant in time to accidentally bump into Mr. Lawton. No, out of the question, because instead of being exhausted after a lesson, Angie always felt like going home and practicing until Mamma arrived.

Angie had discovered, somewhere along the middle of her junior year in high school, that a few hours of practicing immediately after a lesson smoothed the way for the rest of the week's work. The habit was well-established by now , and almost unbreakable. Besides, Angie reasoned, if she got home a short time after noon, started to wash up, comb her hair again, and work on her cuticles, she couldn't get to Max's

until after one o'clock. By that time, Mr. Lawton, Lawton, would have finished eating. Also, she preferred to be there before he arrived, so the meeting would look unplanned. That other time had been a close squeeze, the time when she and Tony had gone to Max's, and she had seen Lawton's hat hanging above a table. Of course she had recognized it! So what if she had told Tony that it probably belonged to Max or Louie, or one of the other workmen. If Lawton hadn't been in the phone booth, things might have been embarrassing. Very fortunately, it had all worked out fine, real fine.

Only--next time--next time it would have to be without Tony. He was too tense these days. Angie decided that if she ever went to Max's again with a friend, Jonah would be preferable to Tony. At least Jonah didn't race around a room trying to grab her.

That last remark of Jonah's--about liking her for himself--he was probably fooling. Nothing to worry about.

When Jonah said something all in one spurt, it didn't mean much, unless he repeated it. When Tony said something suddenly, he usually did repeat it. When Mr. Lawton said something, even once, he meant it. Except of course, that business about waiting for her to grow up--that was his way of joking. Why, though, why did he have to say it? If he carried that woman, Sandy's picture around in his wallet, he probably liked her very much. After all, that woman, Sandy -she had probably known Mr. Lawton for a very long time, much, much longer than Angie--

She felt the beginning of a lump in her throat, and that was no way to go in and take a lesson. Then, she remembered Jonah's explanation of blues music, that part about coffee to wash down a lump in the throat, about how all people have lumps once in a while, and it was nothing out of the ordinary. It was, though, now. When it came to

thinking about Mr. Lawton, there were all kinds of things that could happen to her--lumps in the throat, elevators in the stomach, even riding up into her head, and sometimes--well, she could swear she felt them zooming out through her ears--

No coffee available. Water would have to do, and the fountain was installed right alongside the door to Room 322. Good.

She bent over the white bulblike fountain, turned the wheel, and found it necessary to jump back quickly, out of reach of the high-jumping stream of water. Why didn't somebody fix the thing? It had too much energy. She tried again, turning the wheel very slightly. Better, except that no matter how light was her touch, she couldn't prevent the water fromwashing her face, as well as quenching her thirst. Oh well, the water would wake her up, make her forget her Mr. Lawton-troubles, and make her remember only her music lesson. She took another drink, and allowed the water to swirl around her mouth and cheeks. She released the wheel, stood back and waited to dry off, shaking her head like a drenched tomcat. There! That was another thing! Why didn't she remember to carry handkerchiefs, like a lady should? That made three things to remember--hairbrushing, cuticle-care, handkerchiefs. Sort of complicated, but Mr. Lawtonwas a gentleman, and he expected such things.

Impatiently, she wiped off the remaining water with theback of her hand, then shook the hand to dry it. Ouch! It was twenty minutes to eleven, already! Five minutes late was all right, but ten minutes! Bad! Miss Baylor was probably in the room by now, looking at her wristwatch, taking her glasses off and putting them back on, getting angrier by the minute--

Angie pushed open the door to Room 322, and walked in briskly, swinging her music. She saw Miss Baylor seated at the piano, playing a few chords, experimentally. Miss Baylor had her eyes focused on a point

directly infront of her. Her face was grim, with the mouth wired into a taut line. Her glasses were off, resting on top of the piano. She turned around and blinked at Angie.

"You," she said, and there could be no other, "are exactly ten minutes late!"

"I know," Angie said, "and I'm sorry. But I bumped into a few people in the corridor."

"Angelina, I do not like to be taken advantage of."

"I wasn't trying to take advantage of you, Miss Baylor."

"No? Merely because I am detained for five minutes at the beginning of our hour, there is no reason why you should add another five minutes to our loss."

"I'm sorry, Miss Baylor, really!"

"Well, you certainly should be!"

Angie spread her music on the rack, and pulled another piano stool alongside of Miss Baylor's. She wore a contrite expression on her face. Miss Baylor saw it, and relented. "You don't have to look so mournful, Angelina. I suppose I shall forgive you, eventually."

"Thanks; I'll try not to do it again."

"I know you do not make a habit of it."

"No. I try not to."

"Did you find any of last week's assignment difficult."

"Not really."

"Suppose we try it now?"

Then the lesson began, and for its duration, Lawton was forgotten. The music rose from the piano. Once or twice, Angie fancied that the room was groaning, as was Jamey Leotus', and a few times, Angie thought that the room must be almost reeling with swallows of glory. Pedal-downing feet, sometimes applied too forcefully, made four walls seem to

reverberate. Miss Baylor's comments drifted into a fixed pattern: "Watch that modulation!", "Play that again!", Angelina, please!", "That's a B flat!", "Lift your wrist!", "Use your pedal!", "Slow down; watch it!"

Soon, Angie no longer had to listen. She fell into mood with the music, and automatically corrected herself. She grew overconfident.

"Grazioso!" shouted Miss Baylor. "Grazioso,not march time!"

Angie reconcentrated. There, Miss Baylor was pleased, and so was Angie. Ten more minutes went by, and more confidence...

"A tempo, Angelina, quickly!"

Now, the second plateau, the confidence that had a right to its existence, the confidence built of tuned ears and fingers, straight-backed posture, coordination--

Then came the best part of the lesson. "Now," said Miss Baylor, "we'll play it straight through, together." Off they went, statuses merged, teacher and pupil harnessed together, galloping joyfully over the note-dancing pages.

Angie felt that the room, even the room could hear the prancing, and relax. This was what it had waited for, the room, the good old, always-there room, this space filled with motion, swelling, diminishing, working, sweating, at once self-driven and heedless of self. "Music!" Angie seemed to hear the old baby-grand sing. "Music, listen to me!" And Angie was glad that the corridor was silent, so that the music, confined behind the heavy oak door,could, if it wanted to, escape and wander.

....

The evening came, and with it, Tony. "My Pop wants me to work tonight," he said to Angie, on entering. "That new clerk, Paley, quit yesterday afternoon. He told Pop he couldn't stand the neighborhood."

"That's too bad," said Angie, visualizing herself at the piano for the remainder of the evening, and thinking it was not an unpleasant prospect. After all, with Tony the way he was lately, the piano was far better company. Besides, maybe she could stop practicing at about nine o'clock, and spend an hour or so thinking about Mr. Lawton. Maybe she could memorize some more poetry. She knew all of "Dover Beach" by heart, and maybe she could learn some more Matthew Arnold, just Matthew Arnold. But would Mr. Lawton like that? He hadn't said he liked Arnold, only "Dover Beach." Well, then--she could learn something else, by someone else, of the same period, maybe, some of her own favorites, maybe another period, anything--on the chance that Mr. Lawton might approve. One or two of Shakespeare's sonnets, perhaps? Anyone would do, except that one about the marriage of true minds. Tony liked that, Mamma thought it was a crazy poem, and she, Angie, liked it. But what would Mr. Lawton, Lawton, say about it? Anyway, how did she know she would ever see him again in a place where she could recite poetry to him? The island had been an accident, sheer and simple. But still--life had so many surprises, miracles--

"Honest, Angie, I'm sorry about tonight," Tony broke into her thoughts. "The worst of it is that I'm not free to make a date with you for tomorrow night, either. Pop phoned the agency this morning, and they said they'd send a clerk down as soon as possible, but nobody showed up today. About dinner-time, Pop complained of a pain in his side, so I offered to take over the store for tonight. Now, we aren't even sure if a clerk will come tomorrow."

"Well," said Angie, "I guess such is life. Don't let it bother you. There are worse things. The important thing is for your Pop to feel better."

"Uh huh," Tony said. "But I was looking forward to tonight, especially after the trouble we had yesterday. Angie--did you think about it at all? What I told you?"

"Not that I remember."

"Why not?"

"I had other things to do."

"Angie, how can I go back and work in the store when you forget about me the minute I walk away?"

Angie grew impatient, sweating in her stockings, donned only because she had daydreams of encountering Mr. Lawton some mystical evening. "Ye Gods!" she said. "If I had to go around remembering everything everybody tells me, I wouldn't have any space left in my head. I'd have a nervous breakdown!"

"No!" Tony broke in. "You can't remember everything, but I thought I was a little more important than just anybody!"

Angie shrugged her shoulders. "Well, goodbye," she said.

Mamma came out of the kitchen where she had been putting away the dishes that Angie had wiped. "Allo, Tony," she said. "How you Poppa today? I see you Mamma when I go by Mr. Kopsky's grocery-store tonight, when I coming home from work, and she say you Poppa no feel so good alla day."

"That's right," Tony nodded. "Right now, I'm going back to the store to stay there for the rest of the evening. Pop shouldn't be on his feet so much."

"You good son," Mamma said, shaking her head vigorously, and looking at Angie with a look that Angie recognized as trying to be significant.

Angie loosened her belt, preferring it low-slung. "Mamma," she said. "Tonywas just leaving. Let's not hold him up."

Mamma appeared taken aback. "I no hold him up," she said, defensively. "He already say he have to go back to store. What you think--that I no hear good any more?"

Angie patted her on the shoulder. "No, Mamma--I didn't mean that."

Tony reddenned. "Well, I guess I'll be going."

"'Bye, Tony," Mamma answered. "You come visit here soon, sì?"

"I'll be glad to," Tony said. "Thanks for asking me."

"You alla time welcome," Mamma added.

Angie adjusted her face into what she considered a cold, hard stare. She looked ferocious, Tony thought, and beautiful. "So long," she said to him. Mamma added a final "'Bye!" andreturned to the kitchen, saying, "I think I hear water drip."

"So long," Angie repeated to Tony, who was no closer to the door than he had beenbefore Mamma's entrance.

"Angie--"

"Now what?"

"How about Saturday night? My father will surely have somebody in the store by then."

"You can't be sure of that. Remember--only taxes and death are inevitable."

"Stop teasing me, Angie. This is almost a surety."

"All right then, but let's ask Kid Jonah along."

"But Angie, we never see Jonah on a Saturday night! He'll have a date of his own."

"All right, but I just thought it might be fun."

She had almost said, "it might be more fun," but she had reconsidered. Tony looked sort of sick, standing there, practically wilting away, and all perspired, not at all neat and cool, the way he usually looked.

"Just you and me, then?" Tony asked.

"All right, but if you have to work, don't be afraid to tell me. I can always find something to do."

"I know you can, and I wish it wasn't that way. I wish you looked forward to seeing me, the way--"

"Don't start that again."

"Why not?"

"You know why, Tony. I heard it all the first time."

"That's what I mean, Angie--"

"Honest, Tony, you're going to be late if you don't go back now."

"I'm going, but why do you act like you can hardly wait to push me out of the door?"

"I'm sorry."

He touched her hair, tenderly. "We'll really go out, Saturday night. I'll take you to dinner, and then to a movie. Or maybe I'll get tickets for a show. I haven't seen a show for a long time."

"O.K., Tony, but now you'd better be getting back to the store."

"Uh huh. I'll come over at five, Saturday night, because we'll be having dinner together."

"O.K."

"Goodbye, Angie."

"So long."

After Tony's footsteps had echoed out into the street, Angie con-

sidered changing back into slacks. It wouldn't be worth-while, she reasoned, because it was after seven already, and she wouldn't practice more than another hour. All right, then, she would plan to go to sleep early. Mamma was going out, anyway, to visit her cousin who had just had a baby. Mamma thought the new baby was going to grow up to look like her brother, Pietro. Therefore, she took special interest in him, visiting him weekly, and bringing him little wearable gifts.

Angie went into the bedroom, and changed into her pajamas. The trouser-legs came to about the middle of her calf, the result of years of shrinkage, and years of Angie-growth. She did not mind. They were cooler this way.

She returned to the kitchen. "Mamma," she said. "Why did you have to invite Tony over? He comes anyway."

"Bambina," Mamma said patiently, "I think Tony like when we be big friends to him, and I no mean wrong thing."

"I know."

Mamma bustled about the kitchen, waving a dishtowel, making final dabs at wet spots on the table. "I hurry," she said, "so I can go see bambino before he sleep."

"Don't they put him to sleep way earlier than this?" Angie asked.

"Si, but when I come see, he stay up extra late. Is no good for him, but he sleep later in morning, so is all O.K."

Angie went back into the living-room, to keep from being in Mamma's way. She curled up on the couch, with her poetry anthology. Which poem to memorize?

"Much have I travelled in the realms of gold,
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;
Round many western islands have I been..."

No! No good at all. If she recited that in front of Mr. Lawton, no matter how casually, he might grasp the coincidence of the "western islands." Anyway, the poem wasn't accurate, she remembered learning in school. At the end, where it said

"Or like stout Cortez, when with eagle eyes
He stared at the Pacific--"

it was wrong. That wasn't Cortez; that was Balboa. It had bothered her ever since she had discovered the error, even though at least two teachers had said the mistake wasn't important, adding something about poetic license. Keats still should have known better, poetic license or otherwise; he was no dope.

She turned the pages, scanning poems cursorily.

"'Tis the middle of the night by the castle clock,
And the owls have awakened the crowing cock,
Tu-whit!--Tu-whoo!
And hark, again! The crowing cock,
How drowsily it crew.

Sir Leoline, the Baron rich,
Hath a toothless mastiff bitch..."

Ouch, no good again! First of all, Christabel was too long to swallow all at once; it would take weeks to memorize, and besides, once she learned it, she would have to keep somebody sitting quietly for at least a half-hour in order to get it all said. That wasn't at all a casual approach. She wanted something to say in an offhand manner, as part of conversation, sort of. And then, second of all--she knew she would stumble over the word "bitch" even though it meant a female dog in this case. The word still was something she had difficulty in saying aloud. Back in school, when she had been asked to read the first five stanzas aloud (the teacher was probably trying to save her own voice, lazy creature), she had flushed while reading, amid the sly glances and smiles of her classmates. No. No good.

Well then, what?Which one?

"She walks in beauty, like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies;
And all that's best of dark and bright
Meet in her aspect and her eyes..."

Well? It was a sweet little thing, and it only had three stanzas. But who was "She"? That is, who would it make Mr. Lawton think about? That Sandy woman? Besides, it was Tony's poem; he had liked it even way back when he was fifteen years old. He had scribbled it on a piece of paper, had slipped it into her text-book when she left the room. She had never acknowledge it. Somehow, it had seemed better not to, because Tony had been an awfully shy kid at fifteen, not that he was much better nowadays, except for those occasional strong-man impulses.

If she chose "She Walks in Beauty" to learn by heart, she might forget herself and say it in front of Tony, and who knew what he might think? He might consider it some kind of sentimental overture, and then he would start chasing her around the room again. No, again.

Mammacame into the living-room, wearing the black dress, ready for traveling. "Now I go," she announced. "You go sleep early, si?"

"I dunno," Angie said, trying to sit up, feeling lazy. "It depends."

"Maybe you come with me, bambina? You no see them for long time."

"No, Mamma--not tonight. I'm not in the mood for relatives."

"I tell them you come next week when I go?"

"No--better not tell them anything definite. I'll surprise them some night."

"O.K. 'Bye."

"So long, Mamma, and have a good time."

Mamma cautioned her not to read too long. "I no want big bills from eye-doctor!"

Angie settled back into her comfortable position on the couch. She continued to flip pages, sleepily...

"Little Lamb, who made thee?
Dost thou know who made thee?
Gave thee life and bid thee feed
By the stream and o'er the mead;
Gave thee clothing of delight,
Softest clothing, wooly, bright..."

Aha! Baaa-baa black sheep. Bah. Gooey little thing, gentle and gooey, not in the same way the I-arise-from-dreams -of-thee was gooey, but sort of sloppy gooey, the kind of poem to recite to a baby who would look up at you and make ga-ga, even if he didn't know what you were talking about--

"In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree;
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea..."

Oh beautiful! All of it, fragment or otherwise. Somehow it was enough as it was; a perfect fragment was far better than an imperfect whole. Perhaps it was some sort of magic that had sent someone from Porlock to interrupt Coleridge, keeping him from completing his poem. At least, that was supposed to be the reason why the poem was never finished.

Incomplete? No, come to think of it, the poem was very, very complete. What could come after the end?

...Beware! Beware!
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread,
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise."

It was an end and a beginning if you wanted to look at it that way, and if there were more, it might be as good, but probably not.

She read the poem again, and then again, and then parts of it over

Angie settled back into her comfortable position on the couch. She continued to flip pages, sleepily...

"Little Lamb, who made thee?
Dost thou know who made thee?
Gave thee life and bid thee feed
By the stream and o'er the mead;
Gave thee clothing of delight,
Softest clothing, woolly, bright..."

Aha! Baaa-baa black sheep. Bah. Gooey little thing, gentle and gooey, not in the same way the I-hate-fire-twins -of-thee was gooey, but sort of sloppy gooey, like kind of poem to recite to a baby who would look up at you and make ga-ga, even if he didn't know what you were talking about--

"In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree:
Where Alph, the sacred river ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea..."

Oh beautiful! All of it, fragment or otherwise. Somehow it was enough as it was; a perfect fragment was far better than an imperfect whole. Perhaps it was some sort of magic that had sent someone from Porlock to interrupt Coleridge, keeping him from completing his poem. At least, that was supposed to be the reason why the poem was never finished.

Incomplete? No, come to think of it, the poem was very, very complete. What could come after the end?

"...Beware! Beware!
His flaming eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread,
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise."

It was the end and a beginning if you wanted to look at it that way, and if there were more, it might be as good, but probably not.

She read the poem again, and then again, and then once of it over

and over, and somehow it cooled her, shooed away the hot night, the week's disappointments, spread grass beneath her, on the couch, added a tree rustling above her, and a river flowing busily beside her, with a floor of linoleum for its bed.

The music was not of a dulcimer's notes, but rather the dancing of today's pianos, slowed to grazioso, dimmed to softness by the unconfined room, molded in tone by the leisurely whoosh of the river, sobered by the solemn tree, joined by orchestras of ancient instruments, rising to a muffled, faraway-longago peak, winding downward to a faraway place where voices made music, and poets made poems, and islands were cooled by shadows, and where far, far out on the horizon, the sun drowned in a river of ice...

18.

Mamma returned home at eleven, and found Angie asleep on the couch, in almost the same position she had been in when Mamma had left. Angie was sleeping heavily, her sleek black hair jumbled about her face, one hand fisted at her cheek, the other enclosed by a book.

Mamma took off her black hat with the veil, and went off in search of a nightgown. She came back to undress quietly in the living-room. When the change was complete, she pulled the long black hairpins out of her hair, and sat down at the edge of the couch.

She looked at Angie, long and lovingly. "She funny bambina," she thought. "Now she look so sweet, like real Angel!" She slipped a burly damask-covered pillow under Angie's head. "You wait and see," whispered Mamma. "Wait and see. When she wake up, she get mad because I no make her stay awake and practice piano. In mornings, when she sometimes sleep too late, and I no wake her, she get mad because I no wake her six o'clock in morning. How can I wake her six o'clock in morning when I no wake up myself until is seven o'clock?"

"She say she want to practice. Six o'clock in morning! She wake up whole neighborhood! She rest now. I glad, because next summer, she no have long vacation. I no tell her yet, but she need maybe better clothes next year, maybe money for books and music-papers. Maybe I no be able to pay all. I wait and tell her when summer goes. Meanwhile, let her sleep. Plenty time, plenty time..." Mamma arose on suddenly light feet, and went into the kitchen to make herself a cup of tea. She closed the kitchen door, so as not to disturb her sleeping daughter.

Angie opened one eye, squinted at her wristwatch, and reclosed the

the eye. A moment later, she was awakened by her mother's attemptedly-quiet songburst. She listened, still sleepy, to a Neapolitan mule-song. It was one of a group of songs that Mamma had learned from her now-dead brother Pietro. ("Pietro, he sing like angel. Maybe someday you play piano like Pietro sing!") Pietro had driven his winecart up and down the Neapolitan hills, singing, always singing, to himself and to his mule. When Mamma was a little girl, Pietro once in a while took her with him. Mamma loved the trips.

Angie could almost see her on one of the wine-rides, sitting there proudly on the narrow seat beside her handsome brother, listening to his rolling voice, and watching the tired mule grow wearier and wearier. Angie could see Mamma occasionally glancing behind her at the corkless bottles of wine, sealed with olive oil.

Long ago, the first time Angie had heard the story, she had been bewildered. "Mamma," she had asked, "Mamma, if the bottles didn't have corks on them, how come the wine didn't spill out?" Her mother had explained. "Angelina, there was a little olive oil poured in wine bottle, on top of wine. Olive oil make like a seal. Wine and olive oil no can mix."

It was a bedtime story from that point on. A drowsy little-girl Angie would look up at Mamma, asking, "And the wine never spilled out?"

"No, bambina, never." Mamma would caress the little one's forehead. "The olive oil, she say to wine, 'Hear me--you stay in bottle where you belong!' and the wine say to the olive oil, 'You move away so I can come out!' and the olive oil say, 'No, no, I stay right here on top of bottle. I no move. If I go away and let you come out, Pietro get very mad at me, and maybe never let me live in bottle again!'

"So wine stay where she belong, Angelina mia, because olive oil make her stay put. Good olive oil policeman."

Angie would agree. "Good l'il olive oil." At that point, she would appear ready for sleep. Then, just as Mamma would try to leave, Angie would pop up with, "But what happened to the olive oil? Did people drink it with the wine?"

"No!" Mamma would answer, vigorously shaking her head. "When people got ready to drink the wine, they spill olive oil on floor, so can get to the wine. Sometimes there was trouble."

"Trouble?"

"Si, bambina, trouble, because wine she very intelligente. Wine know what happen to olive oil, so wine say to olive oil, 'You dope, you olive oil, you dope. Nobody want you. They want me! When cart get where it going, you no more big policeman. People spill you on the floor and step on you, and forget all about you. Then they drink me! Olive oil, why you no spill out now, by youself, before people spill you out? Like this, you be the bossa...'"

"Then what, Mamma?"

"Then olive oil always say the same thing to wine, alla time the same thing. 'Wine,' he say, ' you keep quiet and no bother me. I got job to do, and I do my job. Anyhow, wine, how you know what going to happen? You nothing but baby, just got born from grapes. You no know what going to happen any more than I do!'"

"Go ahead, Mamma. Then what did the wine say?"

"Wine she say, 'Look Mr. Olive Oil Policeman, I no more baby than you. I just got born from grapes, like you say, but you no better. You just got born from olives. I tell you what going to happen to you. You no believe me, so no believe me. But you no know what not going to happen,

yes? You no can tell me anything either. So, Mr. Olive Oil Policeman, you do what you want. Stay in bottle. I no care. Only wait and see what happen to you! Wait and see when people spill you out on floor and step on you, with shoes on, and never, never look on you again. Then you be sorry you no run away when wine tell you to!'"

As soon as the dialogue between the olive oil and the wine reached that stage, Angie would fall asleep.

Angie remembered the story now, as she lay abed listening to her mother's muted singing. She remembered what Mamma used to tell her about Pietro, how Pietro would listen to the swishing in the bottles, and tell Mamma that the wine was fighting with the olive oil. Pietro, all ablaze, pretendedly, would turn around and sing to the bottles, "You stop fighting or I'll spill you both out--olive oil and wine alike! Then I'll run my mule over you and leave you here on the dusty road to die!" Pietro would wink a special wink at Mamma and whisper in her ear, "I am not serious, my sister. I would not think of spilling them out. I try only to frighten them into making less commotion."

Then Pietro would try to fool Mamma. He would drive his cart very, very slowly. After a moment, he would cup his hand to his ear. "Aha! There is no longer the swishing in the bottles. The wine has stopped fighting with the olive oil."

Mamma would smile at her brother, pretending not to know the real reason why the swishing had stopped. "My brother, you are very wonderful!" she would say to Pietro, and he would grin at her, wink again, and burst into new song. He would sing more loudly this time, for again he was speeding the mule, and again the bottles were swishing. Mamma

always pretended that the bottles were silent. Pietro deserved such a consideration, for he was truly a wonderful brother...

How, Angie wondered, would Mr. Lawton like the wine and olive oil story? She thought of herself telling it to him, and the story grew even more beautiful as she envisioned an interested Lawton, asking for details--

She forced herself to her feet, donned her moccasins, and went into the kitchen. Mamma stopped singing immediately. "I wake you up?" she asked.

"No, but aren't you afraid of Mrs. Kuller? After all, you worry about her more than I do."

"But I sing real quiet, with door closed."

"I guess it doesn't carry very far. Besides, Mrs. Kuller's apartment borders on the living-room where the piano is, not here in the kitchen. So why don't you sing some more, Mamma?"

"No, bambina. Maybe is better I wake you up. You no can sleep all night on couch."

"I would have awakened anyway, probably around midnight, but thanks anyhow."

"Sì. Now you go sleep, no?"

"I don't feel very sleepy anymore. I must have been dozing on the couch for hours, from about a half-hour after you left. I don't know what got into me!"

"Sleep is good for you."

"So--how was the baby and everybody?"

"Aha! I tell you all about the new little Pietro, so handsome, so sweet, like my dead brother," Mamma said, and embarked upon a complicated description of the baby's evening antics. She spoke for several

word-jammed minutes, until she saw that Angie's head was nodding drowsily, showing eyes that struggled to stay open. "Bambina," Mamma said. "Now is too late to talk more. You go sleep, and I go sleep, and I tell you other time. When you go see the new little Pietro youself?"

"Soon," Angie promised.

"They ask for you. They want know why you no have time to see nobody no more."

"What did you tell them, Mamma?"

"I say my Angelina she very busy girl, work hard on piano-playing alla day, so soon when she go Music School, she be best in class, in school even!"

"Ouch! What did they say to that?"

"They say same thing I all time tell you: When you play piano like my brother Pietro sing, then you be good player."

Angie folded her arms on the table, laying her head upon the. She peeked up at Mamma out of the corner of one eye. "Mamma?"

"Sì?"

"Tell me the story of how you met Poppa--"

"I tell you how I meet Poppa too many times already."

"Tell me again."

"Now is too late in night. Better you should go sleep. I tell you tomorrow night, early."

"It won't take long. Tell me now."

"No, bambina. Story stay for another day. Now you better should go sleep. Me, too, I work tomorrow. You no remember?"

"Go ahead, Mamma, tell me about it."

"If I tell you, you fall asleep while you listen, because is too late now for stories."

"No, I'm awake, honest!"

Mamma began: "Like this is story: You young now, still, and you no know world good. Like when you go look for job. If you to bossa and say 'I no need job. I no have to work,' bossa say you work. He give you job for spite. If you need job, then they say, 'Come back tomorrow, maybe next year, maybe we have something then.' Maybe you no see why I tell you this now, but I tell you this because I want you should know world and alla tricks of world. World has real funny tricks, not always what-you-call-it justice, but sometimes it work out alla right.

"So now I tell you how I meet my Giuseppe. When I was a little bit older than you now, I ask my Poppa can I go to festa in nighttime. He no need me in house. But he say no. So I ask my Mamma, and she scared from my Poppa, so she say no just like he say. So I wait for when they go sleep, and I get in my festa-dress and put on shoes, and I go quiet to festa by myself. I get there, and you know what happen? Renzo--he my boyfriend then, he no there. All around I look for Renzo, and he still no there. I very mad, get more mad, because only reason I go to festa is because my Renzo say he meet me there. So I go all over festa and ask if anybody see Renzo.

"They tell me he go out with my cousin Rosa. So I get more mad, but later in night, I still at festa, and I start think maybe my Poppa and Mamma they told me right when they say I no should go. If I no go, I no found out, and I never know, so maybe I marry Renzo instead of you Poppa who die before I get chance to see him with grey hair. So maybe I better off if I listen to my Mamma and Poppa. Looks like il Dio knows what he do when he tell them what they should say. Me, I sad. My Renzo, he so very beautiful was! When he and Rosa have wedding, every-

thing is good again. And Renzo, at wedding, he come to me and say, 'I sorry.' And while he stand there, making talk with me, I look behind his head and see tall strange man.

"Tall strange man looks right over head of Renzo, and say, 'Renzo, who this pretty girl?' and Renzo he tell the tall strange man my name, and tell me the tall strange man his friend is, his friend Giuseppe, and that how I meet Giuseppe, you Poppa."

Angie propped up her chin and smiled contentedly. "That's such a nice story, Mamma. But I want to know something else, besides."

"What?" Mamma asked.

"How did you know the tall strange man was the right one for you? I mean, did you forget all about how you used to feel about Renzo when you met the new man?"

"Quick I forget, bambina. Molto quick!"

"That's the way it can happen, huh, Mamma?"

"Not alla time. I no can say for next person."

"But it happened that way for you, so it could happen for someone else, couldn't it?"

"I no know. Meanwhile, you go sleep now. Too late to talk."

"O.K.," Angie said, and started to fall asleep on her arms.

Mamma stood up, gently pulling Angie to her feet. "Not here on kitchen table. You go sleep in bed. What you got bed for?"

"O.K.," Angie said, agreeably, bleary-eyed, walking wobble-fashion out of the room. "G'night, Mamma."

"Sleep good, bambina," Mamma answered. "Sleep good."

.....

Friday night, Lawton decided to get a full night's sleep. By ten

o'clock, in pajamas and robe, he had finished showering, and was settled, comfortably near his radio.

He lifted the phone to call Sandy. Now or never.

Not now. Ten o'clock wasn't exactly the recommended hour for phone-calls, even under amiable circumstances . No, hustler or no hustler, this was difficult.

If only she would take the initiative! If only she would let him know by some means, any means, that she would respond if he contacted her!

Useless. Lawton turned off the radio commentator, and went to bed.

19.

Angie spent Saturday afternoon wandering in the park. The Mr. Lawton-bench was occupied by a young couple, entangled in each other's arms. As Angie approached the bench, they broke apart, staring at her hostilely.

"I told you we should keep away from here, especially in the damned daytime!"

"But darling, where else can we go?"

Angie, feeling sorry for them, pretended to busy herself in an inspection of her wrist. She quickened her pace,walking away.

A few yards down the path, a squirrel was perched on the back of a bench. "Can't help you," Angie said. "No peanuts." The squirrel scurried away. Angie sat down on the bench, felt something moist beneath her lightweight skirt, and jumped up. A bird tittering on a tree-branch directly above the bench seemed to mock her.

Angie found the nearest water-fountain, strewn with plucked leaves and debris. She wet her handkerchief (she had remembered to carry it) and retired behind a bush to clean the back of her skirt. Then, she returned to the squirrel-bench, and sat down at the edge of the seat to allow her skirt to dry. The bird above let fall another sickly-colored drop, which landed almost in the same place as before. Angie glared up at the bird bombardier, smiling to herself. "Good aim," she thought, glad that she had changed her seat. Now, really, what could the bird be thinking of, messing her bench like that? After all, she had always been a friend to the birds. Hadn't she buried one back there at summer's beginning, she and Tony? A regular funeral! Didn't knowledge of such things circulate around the bird spheres?

H er skirt was almost dry, at least dry enough not to show if she walked, she decided. She stood up, smoothed her clothes, felt behind her once again to make sure if it was safe, concluded it was, and moved on.

Two little boys were sitting on the next bench, playing a game with small square cards, bearing bird-pictures. As Angie passed them, one little boy eyed her critically. "Yer wet in the pants!" he called. His friend echoed him. "Yer wet in the behind! Dirty behind!"

Angie called out to them. "Shut up!" She cut off the path, in through the bushes, and out on an inner, less-peopled road. She would keep walking, she decided, unless she saw someone. It would be easier to dry off if she walked than if she sat down. Those little boys! Golly!--what if she ran into Mr. Lawton while she was still wet? She would get around that--very simple--if he were sitting on a bench, she would sit down beside him, fast enough for him not to see the stain, If he were standing, she would keep herself in front of him.

But the way things looked, there would not be any Mr. Lawton today. Last week was an accident, of course. Of course! So, if she realized it was an accident, why was she here looking for him? "Hope springs eternal in the human..." The human what? Beast or breast? They both made sense. Maybe she could teach herself to pronounce it in such a way that it sounded like a cross between both words. Bree-ust, sort of. Silly!

Where was he? Where was he sitting, or talking, or walking? Why wasn't he here! Working? Still at the office? No. His car hadn't been there when Angie had passed the building at noon. Had he gone straight home after work? Probably. But maybe--maybe he was out on the lake. Perhaps he had liked rowing so much last week that he had done

it again, by himself this time. It seemed plausible. Well, there--her problem was solved. She would get herself a rowboat and go cruising around the lake, keeping a casual lookout for him. Then, if she saw him, she could wave, sort of row up alongside of him. Maybe they could both row out to the island this time, and talk a while. It would look all right to him, wouldn't it? After all, she had a book with her, like last week, and she thought she had given him the impression she usually read out on the lake.

A sad thought crossed her mind; it made her stop in her tracks. Supposing--well, supposing Mr. Lawton was out rowing with somebody, that woman, Sandy, maybe. Supposing Mr. Lawton had liked last Saturday so much that he had made up his mind to do it again, only this time he had his own company with him. Angie shuddered, thinking of how it would feel if she rowed out into the middle of the lake, maybe even to the island, and found Mr. Lawton there with that Sandy woman. What would they all say to each other? How would Mr. Lawton introduce Sandy? Would he say to Angie, "This is my friend," or maybe, "This is my fiancée," or what?

Angie strode in the direction of the lake. She would not hire a rowboat; instead she would wander around the banks and see if she recognized Mr. Lawton. Then, if she saw him, she could hide behind a bush or something, and take the chance of his not seeing her. If he was alone, she would hire a boat and do as she had originally planned. If he was with someone, she would turn around and go home.

The lake looked unusually empty. The rowboats were lined up in a bobbing row, fastened by ropes to the dock. A sign, nailed to the side of the boathouse, read: "Twenty Rowboats for Hire. Come Early and Be Sure of Service. The Early Bird Catches the Worm."

Birds again, bah!

Twenty boats, then, only twenty. Well, she would count the unused boats. One, two, three--there were nineteen tied to the dock. Would Lawton be in the twentieth? She would use strategy to find out, she decided.

She walked up to the ticket-taker's window. "Hello," she said. "I'm looking for my cousin, and I was wondering if he was out on the lake. I noticed there's only one boat in use."

"Is your cousin a man or a woman?" the ticket-man asked.

"A man."

"He ain't on the lake. The only boat out has three girls in it. They're due back in twenty minutes. Said they'd keep it only for the hour."

"Thank you."

That was that. No Mr. Lawton today. He had probably gone home, but that was better than if he had gone onto the lake with somebody else.

Angie started home, thinking a lot of mixed-up things, like when would she see Mr. Lawton again, and would he ever go out to the island by himself, and exactly who was that Sandy, and what if Mr. Lawton suddenly stopped working for the Caswell Company, and would she ever see him if he went away, and who were his friends, and what did he think of her, and had he thought she was a sissy because he had caught her crying last week, and how would he treat her if he ever saw her again, and how in the world could she go through a date with Tony tonight while all she could think of was Mr. Lawton? Wednesday and Thursday had not been hard to live through. There had been piano-practicing to do, hair to brush twice daily, and a cuticle to push back with a wet towel, but Friday, yesterday, had meant waiting for Saturday, and here it was Saturday, and no Mr. Lawton.

Angie slumped as she walked, not caring about posture and what would someone think if someone saw her. She forgot about the wet spot until she passed the bench where the two little boys were sitting.

"There's the girl with the wet pants!"

"Yah! Yer dirty in the pants! Yah! Yaah!"

Angie marched up to the little boys, with a sinister look on her face. She towered above them. She folded her arms and glared a ferocious glare. "Shut up, you two, or I'll knock your teeth in!" she said. The two little boys looked at each other in bewilderment.

"We was only kidding," one of them said. "Yeah," said the other. "We was only kidding, and anyway, yer pants ain't wet now more!"

"O.K.," said Angie, grim-mouthed. "Only don't let it happen again or I'll tell your mothers!"

The little boys did not stir. One of them, after a moment, flicked a mosquito off his arm. "We was only kidding, we said," he repeated. "O.K.," Angie said, striding away, angrily. After she had walked a few feet, she heard one of the young offenders say to the other, "No sense a humor!" The other agreed. "Nah," he said, "naah, no sense a humor at all!"

Angie went on walking, with a smile on her face, which she was certain the boys couldn't see. No "sense a humor" huh? Well, what did it matter today? The week was wasted, the whole long week. Even this walk home seemed wasted.

She crossed the street to the shady side. There, parked in front of a tobacco store, was a very familiar automobile. Mr. Lawton's!

He came out of the store, tearing the cellophane from a package of cigarettes. He saw her.

"Hello, Angie," he said, guardedly. "Were you rowing today?"

"No, just walking, Mr. Lawton."

"Rather warm today, isn't it?"

"Not bad.Did you work today, Mr. Lawton?"

"Up until a half-hour ago."

"Oh." (But why hadn't his car been parked in front of his office?)

Angie shifted her weight. This was uncomfortable, standing here talking in the street, not at all like on the island. Anyway, he looked like he wanted to run away--

"Your car looks shiny, Mr. Lawton." (Wasn't he ever going to ask her to call him Al again?)

He surveyed his car. "It certainly does shine. I left it in a local garage this morning, for a wash."

"Oh."

"Well, I'll be moving on, Angie. Can I give you a lift?"

"I only live a few blocks away, but--"

"Hop in."

"Thanks, Mr. Lawton."

In the car, they were silent, while Angie wondered again why he didn't tell her to call him Al. Maybe he had forgotten about last week, howhe had corrected her every time she said,"Mr. Lawton." Maybe he would remember now, if she said it again--

"Mr. Lawton?"

"Yes?"

"It's cooler than last week, last Saturday, that is."

"So it is."

She directed him towards her street. He pulled up in front of her house. She put her hand on the door-lever. "Thanks,Mr. Lawton."

"Quite all right."

"Well, so long."

"So long, Angie."

She got out of the car, and walked away without looking back. When she reached the apartment, panting, she looked out of the front window in time to see him at the corner, waiting for the light to change. She felt a terrible lump all over her, and wondered an immense Why? What had been the matter? He hadn't even been as friendly as he had been way back at the beginning of the summer. Had she said anything wrong, done anything? Wasn't she, if anything, looking better than last week?

In the bedroom, she took off shoes, stockings, skirt and bluse, and flopped down on the bed, to think a little while. The island seemed a faraway, forgotten place, further than Xanadu, and today, Mr. Lawton (no more Al) was as remote as Kubla Khan himself. The only word she could think of to describe today's meeting was dry, plain dry, and the elevators in her stomach were there, still there, but they were going zig-zag now, not up and down. Mr. Lawton hadn't even had a chance to see the improvement in her cuticles; furthermore, she wasn't even certain that he had noticed the new, well-brushed shine of her hair. What a day! Bah! Pissing-birds, and nasty little boys, and an empty lake, and Mr. Lawton with a dry face. "Sophocles," she spat out the word. "Sophocles--bah!" The poem. "Bah!" She messed up her hair. "Turbid ebb and flow of human misery'--bah!" All wet, that's what it was; that was what was wrong with it; it was all wet. "'Ebb and flow'--bah!" Misery was a dry thing, not a drop of moisture in it, not inside. Dry as park-dust, and gritty in the fingernails, the kind of dry dustiness that got into your pores and made you feel like they couldn't breathe, and you were rapidly getting all clogged up.

.....

Tony arrived at the stroke of five o'clock, resplendent in a seersucker suit. "Hello," he said, cool and proud, aware that he looked good. He had gone to special pains.

Angie inspected him. "I didn't know you had one of those pajama-cloth suits."

He didn't understand. She repeated. "Those pajama-cloth suits, like you're wearing now. What do they call that material?"

"Seersucker," he said.

"Oh," she said. "I call them pajama-cloth sui--"

"I heard you the last time."

He remained standing. "Are you ready to leave?" he asked. "Wait a minute," she said. "I have to leave a note for Mamma. It seems I told her I was going out with you, but maybe she has the idea that I'll be home soon. Maybe I will."

Tony glowered. While Angie was in the kitchen, writing her note, Tony wondered how in the world he could possibly please her. Pajamas! Pop would take a fit if he heard that. Pop liked corded suits better than seersuckers himself, but when Tony had chosen the latter, Pop had agreed it wasn't a bad idea. Cool and neat-looking. "Add a lightweight, short-sleeved shirt," Pop advised, "and a summerweight tie, ventilated shoes--and a man's as lightly -dressed as a woman!" Pop had wanted him to take one of the new plastic belts, but Tony couldn't stand them; theywere too slimy. Also, Tony had balked at the Panama hat, another one of Pop's offerings. Pop periodically acted as if he wanted to make a playboy out of his son. "Pajama-cloth"suit!

Angie returned. "So," she asked, "where are we going?"

"Anything special you want to eat?" Tony inquired.

"I don't care."

"No ideas at all?"

"No. You do the thinking. Try."

"All right, Angie. How about sea-food?"

"I hate it. Besides, it's cannibalistic--they cook the lobsters while they're still alive."

"Shrimp?"

"Too chewey."

"How about Chinese food?"

"It isn't authentic. Chop suey is an American dish."

"So what?"

"So nothing. Got any more ideas?"

"Spaghetti, lasagna, ravioli?"

"Might as well stay home."

"How about straight American food? There's a good restaurant about twenty minutes away by subway. It's called 'The Golden Terrior,' I think."

"O.K."

A half-hour later found Tony ceremoniously holding the restaurant door open for Angie. "After you, Mademoiselle," he said, winking at her. "O.K." she said, indifferently. It would not hurt to practice, even if Mr. Lawton--

"I feel like having shrimps," Tony said, breaking into her silence. Angie turned and whispered into his ear, "Why don't we wait until we sit down before you make up your mind." He grimaced for answer. The waiter seated them.

"Why don't you try the shrimps?" Tony suggested. "You said they were chewey--but I don't remember you saying you'd ever eaten any."

"I haven't. They look chewey, that's all."

"Why don't you try them?"

"I thought this wasn't a sea-food place."

"They have shrimp, lobster, clams--but it isn't exclusively sea-food."

"I'll have the clams, then."

"Sure?"

"Sure."

The waiter hovered nearby as they took their first mouthfuls. Tony was enthusiastic; Angie was speculative. She dug into her first clam, not bothering to flavor it, She squished it around on her tongue, and beamed at Tony. "What a texture!" she said.

"What do you mean, texture?" he asked.

She squished some more, turning the clam into a solid mouthwash. It was obvious that she wasn't chewing it. It's all texture!" she exclaimed. "Really an aesthetic sensation! I can't even describe it. Thanks for suggesting clams, Tony. I never would have thought of it myself.

Tony paused, his fork suspended in air. "Aren't you ever going to swallow?" he asked.

"No," Angie said, "not until I get the full value of the texture."

"Have it your way," said Tony.

The waiter busied himself at the next table, and watched Tony and Angie out of the corner of his eye. He listened with a trained ear, having learned a long time ago that hearing was partly a matter of concentration, and a wise waiter did well to learn concentration. Texture? He had never heard that before, not in reference to clams. Satin, not clams, could be described in terms of texture. He walked over to their table.

"Is everything satisfactory?" he asked, smiling professionally, with a slight nod, head to one side.

"Very," Tony assured him.

Angie swallowed her mouthful, reluctantly. "What a texture!" she said. "Wonderful!" She transferred her beam to the waiter, assuming that he was to be thanked for the texture of the clams. "And the taste?" the waiter inquired. Angie shook her head. "Good, but not as good as the texture," she told him.

The waiter's smile was uncontrollably enlarging. He forced it back into what he considered proper professional proportions. "Would Madame prefer another sauce?" he inquired.

"Sauce?"

"Yes. Perhaps the tomato sauce is not satisfactory to you?"

"Was I supposed to put sauce on this?" Angie asked, looking from the waiter to Tony. The waiter was noncommittal. Tony came to his rescue. Turning to Angie, he said, "People usually do flavor the clams." The waiter smiled gratefully, nodding to Tony, a slight, confidential nod.

"Well," said Angie, "if that's the way it's supposed to be, I'll do it." She proceeded to douse the remaining clams in tomato sauce. "It looks bloody," she said.

The waiter poured water into the glasses. "Will there be anything else?" he asked.

"Coffee," Tony said, "and what kind of dessert would you like, Angie?" Angie looked around for a menu. The waiter took one from under his arm and handed it to her, solemnly. She looked up at him. "Why do restaurants always hide menus?" she wanted to know. "People no sooner get them in their hands, when--whoosht!--someone takes them away."

The waiter felt his smile returning. He forced it into a compromise position. "We have," he said, "no wish to clutter up the tables. In addition, the bills-of-fare are written by hand, and are therefore not plentiful."

"Oh," said Angie, taking the offered menu. "I'll have the cheesecake," she said. Tony glanced over her shoulder. "I'll have the cheesecake, too," he added.

The waiter nodded again. "And coffee for both?" he asked.

"Yes," Tony said.

When the waiter had gone, Angie turned to Tony. "Tell me, please," she began, "why people in restaurants always refer to items of food as the this, the that, the cheesecake, the veal cutlet, and so forth? Why not plain cheesecake, veal cutlet, and all the rest? Why the the?

Tony broke off a piece of roll and buttered it. "I'm not sure," he said. "It seems to be standard procedure." After a moment, he asked, "Angie, do you like this place? Are you glad you came?"

Angie ignored him. "And another thing," she said. "I'll never for the life of me understand why it's supposed to be polite to eat bread in little pieces. Frankly, I think it tastes better when it's eaten all in one slice. The other way, it's too much bother, I think."

"I agree with you," Tony said, "but I'm trying to do the proper thing."

Angie poked another clam into her mouth. "Ummm..." she hummed. "This texture--I can't get over it! It's terrific!"

"I wish I was," Tony said, wistfully, taking a sip of water.

"Wish you were what?" Angie asked, preoccupied.

"Terrific."

"Oh."

He waited for something more than "Oh." After a second sip of water, he said, "Maybe someday--"

Angie waved a salted cracker at him. "Don't," she said, "don't spoil the clams." Tony shut up.

After the waiter had brought them their dessert and coffee, he returned to the kitchen. It was time for his own dinner, and out of curiosity, not that he hadn't eaten them before, he chose clams. At a small table, in a little room off the kitchen, he ate, a napkin tucked into his collar. He could not run the risk of getting himself splattered, not with the restaurant remaining open until midnight. How dreadfully hot it was this evening! At times such as these, he resented his baldness, and with it, his toupé. If only he dared removr it, for as little as fifteen minutes! He downed a glass of water in two long gulps, turning them into an almost sensual experience.

Now then--the clams! What in heavens did that girl mean by referring to their "texture"? If anyone in the very world was aware of texture, it was himself, and he had never been particularly enamoured by the so-called "texture" of clams. Would he not have noticed it long ago, if it had existed? He rolled one on his tongue, concentrating. Absurd! The taste was of significance, nothing else. Hurriedly, he finished the remaining half-dozen, and washed them down with a swallow taken furtively from a small, cup-size leather-covered flask in his pocket. This was texture, not the clams! Hating the necessity for doing so, he ate a few mints, also from his pocket. He completed his meal by drinking a cup of very hot coffee, black, swirling the first few sips between his teeth, convinced that his breath would be thereby disguised.

He wiped his lips, delicately. He carried his plates back into

the kitchen, washed his hands, and walked out into the main room of the restaurant. The young clam-eater and her escort had departed, he observed. Under a glass, a half-dollar shone. The waiter pocketed it, and walked away, summoning a young busboy with a flick of his brow.

"Jimmy," he said to the busboy. "You've eaten clams, have you not?"

"Yep," said Jimmy.

"Tell me," the waiter asked, "what do do you like most about clams?"

"The way they feel on my tongue," Jimmy answered, promptly.

"I see," the waiter said, "I see."

The waiter observed some new arrivals, seated at one of the tables in his "station". He smiled automatically, hastening towards them. He filled their water glasses, and waited, politely, for their orders. He hoped, wanly, that they would not request clams. They did.

.....

In the movies, Tony tried to take Angie's hand. She resisted. He waited until the newsreel was over, and tried again. She resisted. He edged closer until their shoulders were touching. She moved away. He put his hands in his lap, clasped them as a child in school might do. He moved to the far end of his seat, and gazed sternly at the screen. He kept his legs tightly together, straight as a pair of newly-installed poles.

Angie bent over and whispered to him. "Oh, all right!" she said. He tensed as he felt her lips near his ear. He seized her hand in both of his. "Angie," he whispered, "you don't know how much this means to me, to be able to--"

"Sheddap!" Angie snarled. "Let's watch the picture!"

They watched it. The movie was about a handsome young man With an Idea. With ten dollars and The Idea, he developed a popcorn stand into a giant enterprise, complete with box after box after box of popcorn, complete with a radio program of his own, featuring a smiling trio singing the merits of the popcorn to the tunes of current songs.

After a short while, the young man With The Idea fell in love with a girl who sang in the trio. He asked her to marry him, and she refused, saying that he was far too wealthy for her. He, she said, was the Popcorn King, and she was only a struggling singer who had come from a poor little town in Illinois, and had only recently made good. Her background, and his, she claimed, were dissimilar and irreconcilable. They would never get along, she said, adding that she might prove embarrassing to him in social spheres.

He pleaded with her; she ignored him. He pursued her; she eluded him. Years passed. He grew older, greyed tastefully at the temples. He grew richer.

She took a tramp steamer to Europe, worked in night clubs, singing sentimental songs, until she had enough money saved for music lessons. She embarked upon her classical career. She became a famous opera singer.

He never wed; she never wed.

He read in a newspaper that she was returning to America. She would land triumphantly, to be whisked away for an engagement at Carnegie Hall, followed by a long contract with the Metropolitan. He threw the newspaper on the floor, kicked at a nearby bag of popcorn, and exclaimed, "This time I won't take no for an answer!"

He stood at the pier. She saw him. He removed his hat and took her in his arms. "Isn't that the Popcorn King?" one reporter asked

another. "Yeh, well so it is!" a second reporter exclaimed. "There must be some story behind this!" a third reporter said. The three of them rushed over to the Popcorn King and the opera singer. "How long have you known each other?" they asked, almost in unison. The Popcorn King looked deeply into the opera singer's eyes. "Forever," he whispered. The opera singer looked deeply into the Popcorn King's eyes. "Yes," she sighed, "forever."

The three reporters let out a short whoop. "What a story!" the first one said. "Tell me, Mr. Popcorn King," the second one said, "do you two intend to get married?" The third one waved his pencil. "Yeh, tell!" he said.

The Popcorn King continued to look deeply into the opera singer's eyes. "Will you marry me, darling?" he asked. She looked up at him, adoringly, "Oh, Roger," she murmured. The Popcorn King whisked her into his limousine. "But the reporters--" she said, trying to stop him. He looked at her sternly. "No buts this time," he said. She curled into the crook of his arm, purring.

The chauffeur, on mumbled orders from the Popcorn King, drove them to Prospect Park in Brooklyn. The car stopped. The Popcorn King took his lady by the hand and led her to the park entrance. "Here," he told her, "is where I began. I wasn't the Popcorn King, then. I was only a young man With an Idea. But I believed in that Idea."

The opera singer murmured, "I understand." The Popcorn King went on to describe, step by step, his rise from Young Man With an Idea to Popcorn King. There were a few flashbacks, short-lived and dramatic, as he spoke. When his story was told, he whispered, "Now, will you marry me? "Yes," was her answer. "Yes, yes." They embraced.

The call of a peanut-vendor interrupted them. "Pea-nuts! Nickala bag!

Getcher red hots!" Their embrace broken, they faced the peanut-vendor with hilarious faces. "Peanuts?" the opera singer said. "Peanuts? When I have the Popcorn King for my very own?" The Popcorn King kissed his Queen, and the picture ended.

Tony turned up his nose in distaste. "Very inferior picture," he whispered to Angie. "Why didn't we go see a French film?"

Angie pulled her hand free. "I liked it," she said. For a while, though, I was afraid she wasn't going to get him."

"Wasn't it a case of him getting her, not the reverse?"

"Depends on how you look at it. Now, you sound like Jonah."

"How?"

"I dunno--your voice."

"Is that good or bad?"

"Well, I'm not sure."

Angie felt someone tapping her shoulder. She turned around to see a smiling, red-cheeked man leaning forward. "Shhh..." he whispered, soothingly. "My wife can't hear what's going on." Angie slipped deeper into her seat, slumping. "Shhh..." she said to Tony.

"Angie?"

"What?"

"Let's go home. If the second feature is as bad as this one, we're only wasting our eyesight. Besides, I want to talk to you. The summer is almost over, and--"

"Shhh..."

"Come on, let's go."

"No. Sh..."

This time, it was the man seated behind Tony who tapped him on the shoulder. "Please be quiet," he said.

"Sure," Tony answered. "Angie?"

"What?"

"Let's go."

"No."

"Well, as long as we're staying, want me to get some candy?"

"And spoil the texture of the clams?"

"Don't tell me you can still feel it?"

"You think I have no imagination?"

"But it's been several hours!"

"The memory lingers on, like the song says."

A woman in the row in front of them turned her head sharply. "Well, I never!" she said.

"Never what?" said Angie, curiously.

"Such impudence!" the woman exclaimed, bobbing her nose. "I'll call an usher!"

"We're sorry," Tony said.

Tony went off in search of candy, and when he returned, the second feature was on. Angie didn't seem to be paying any attention to it. "Let's go home," she said. Tony put the candy-bars into her lap. "O.K.," he agreed, "but why didn't you tell me before?"

The ride home was uneventful, as was the walk from the train to Angie's house. Tony gripped her hand securely all the way home, but Angie managed to turn it into a dead weight. At her door, he paused, about to start a conversation, but Angie yawned, said "Thanks, I had a good time, especially the clams," and walked into her front doorway, throwing a half-hearted "G'night" out to the space behind her. Tony's "Wait!" was lost in the sound of the door closing.

In his room, Tony undressed, throwing his clothes into a heap on the

chair, not caring what happened to his new suit, or shirt, or tie. He fell asleep wondering if he was abnormal because he wanted to strangle Angie, periodically. Fortunately, he was too tired to think about it.

20.

A miracle happened on Monday afternoon.

Angie had set aside that afternoon for a trip uptown, to a large music store where she intended to buy some long-needed sheet music. Rising at her usually early hour, she dressed quickly, and had breakfast with Mamma.

"Where you go today, bambina?"

"Uptown. I have to get some music."

"You got enough of the money?"

"Yes. I have three dollars saved up."

"I glad you have enough, because I no have extra money until Friday pay."

After Mamma left for work, Angie practiced for a concentrated hour. Then, careful to close and lock the windows, she left the house, giving the door an extra-special slam. She walked throught the still-early morning, lost in thought, so lost that she almost walked into a bakery truck. "Hey, sister!" the driver cried. "Wanna get killed?" He stopped for a light, giving Angie a chance to turn around and smile. "Not especially," she said, good-naturedly. The driver softened, and grinned back at her, beads of perspiration forming in the creases of his mouth. "O.K., sister," he shouted. "If yuh wanna live, watchyer step! This ain't a hell of a healthy city for little girls who cross the street moony-eyed. Hell, sister--why dontcha marry the guy?" The light changed, and he drove away, waving goodbye.

Angie crossed the street and continued walking, striding as heedless of traffic and pedestrians as before. What harm could befall her? Things always happened to other people, anyway. Even in high

school hygiene classes, she had been unimpressed by the teacher's comments on germs. Germs, reasoned Angie, were things that happened to other people. Diseases, therefore, were things that _others_ fell prey to. Even if she and a lot of other people were exposed to germs at the very same time, she would be immune. Fortunately, she had enjoyed good health for all of her life, except for occasional eyestrain. "I guess, though," she thought, "I must have given Mamma quite a time!" Mrs. Tartrina had had great difficulty in getting Angie to eat what she considered the proper foods.

"You drink milk so you no get weak teeth!"

"I won't get weak teeth anyway, Mamma!"

"You eat broccoli! Eat all pieces on plate!"

"I don't like it, Mamma!"

"Broccoli is healthy for you body, so you eat!"

"I don't like the way it _looks_, Mamma!"

"What you care for way it _looks_, _bambina?_ Broccoli is to eat, not to look!"

Angie was quite a milk-drinker these days, but it was because she had once seen Mr. Lawton drinking it, not because she was in fear of weak teeth. _She_ lose her teeth? Nope, nothing could happen to her, nothing at all. "Mamma," she had come home one day, and said, as soon as she had learned a new "big word,""Mamma, I'm _indestructible_."

"What means that?" Mamma had asked.

"It means that nothing can hurt me, or break me, or anything."

"I hope you right, but if I was you, I no take chances anyway."

"But I'm _indestructible_, Mamma. Nothing can hurt me, ever!"

"_Bambina_, I hope, I pray you right. Maybe is good idea you should remember you are how-you-say-it?"

"Indestructible."

"Sì. You remember this anyhow. You eat right, and think right, and no run after things that you no can have, and then you be how-you-say-it-again?"

"Indestructible."

"Sì. Meanwhile, you eat you broccoli."

Maybe there was some magic watching over her, some pocket-sized genie who kept a watchful eye on her, all the time, always and forever, the physical her. Why didn't some genie come along now and take care of her Mr. Lawton-troubles? How about another genie to keep Tony from acting so queer? Maybe another genie to keep her practicing the piano without interruption? Maybe still another one for miscellaneous things? Heck--she could use a whole popcorn-gallery full of genies. Pfuie--that had been an awful movie, come to think of it, that Popcorn King thing. Tony had been right all along, but she hadn't been in the mood to agree with him. Maybe she would tell him, next time she saw him. Boy! Tony could use a few genies all by himself. Jonah? No. Jonah was rough and tumble, but he seemed to get along without hurting himself too much. Mr. Lawton--? Maybe he could use a genie to tell him that a girl named Angie thought he was wonderful--

Angie ran down the subway steps, dropped a coin in the box and caught an uptown train. It was a fairly empty train. Angie looked around for someone interesting to stare at, saw no one, and leaned back in her seat, annoyed. Why hadn't she brought something to read? She busied herself inspecting the subway posters, and found herself bored, until she found an advertisement that pictured a man looking like Mr. Lawton. She stared at it, and dreamed--

Interruption. A small voice whined into her ear. "Missus, you

wanna take a chance?" The voice belonged to a little redheaded boy, about the same age as the boys who had put her through the yer-pants-are-wet ordeal in the park last Saturday. The association made her feel an immediate resentment towards this new little boy.

He seated himself beside her, looking up at her imploringly.

"I said, Missus, you wanna take a chance?"

"Chance on what?"

"It's a raffle. Winner gets a radio."

"I have a radio."

"If you win, you get a new one."

"I still don't need one."

"But, Missus, it's the last raffle in the book! I sold twenty-four already!"

"I don't want a raffle."

"But Missus, you mean you don't wanna take a chance?"

"No."

"It's only a nickel."

"A nickel? And you're only selling twenty-five tickets? That comes to a dollar and a quarter. How can you buy a radio for a dollar and a quarter?"

"All my friends are selling chances, too."

"Oh."

"So you wanna take a chance?"

"When is the drawing going to be?"

"What's that?"

"I mean, when are you going to find out who the winner is?"

"Next Friday."

"I still don't want it. These things aren't on the level."

"This one is, Missus!"

"I never knew anybody who won."

"That's their luck, Missus. How do you know you won't be luckier?"

"Well, all right."

She gave him a nickel, which he pocketed joyfully, assuring her she wouldn't be sorry. She stood up to leave. "You know, kid," she said, "you ought to become a salesman when you grow up." It pleased him. His eyes followed her out of the train. Suddenly, he bounced out of his seat and yelled, "Hey, Missus, you forgot to take your raffle-ticket!" He stood up on his seat, and peered out of the open train-window. "Hey, Mis-sus!"

Looking in at him through the dusty window, she said, "I guess I did forget." "Here, Missus," he said, promptly tearing out the ticket, and giving it to her through the window, "and I hope ya win!"

"Thanks!" she shouted, as the train pulled out of the station. They waved goodbye to each other, grinning like old friends.

Angie, out in the street, walked a block-and-a-half and found the music store. She made her purchases, surprised that they totalled only $1.98. That meant she had about seventy-five cents left, out of the three dollars with which she had started the day. What could she do with seventy-five cents, she wondered, feeling rich. Maybe she would splurge on something? That would be all right; she hadn't splurged for a long time, not since she had bought that studded belt because it looked like a thin version of the kind motorcyclists wear. That had been almost a full year ago. She was entitled to another splurge, especially after her recent troubles with Mr. Lawton and Tony. But what to buy?

Falling into her usual antelope-stride, she moved down the street, stopping at shop-windows. She saw a handbag she liked, but it cost more than seventy-five cents. It was made of saddle-leather, tan, with

dark-brown embossing. She liked it; it had a shoulder strap. The thought of carrying a bag suspended from her shoulder was pleasant, but seventy-five cents might not even buy the strap. Propped up beside the bag was a pair of pigskin gloves, cork-colored, with a placard in front of them, saying "Reduced to $5.95." Hah! She couldn't even produce the ninety-five cents! Somehow, though--it didn't bother her.

When she passed a sports' supplies store, she returned to look at the window display. In addition to rods and reels, guns (with a big sign in front of them cautioning customers to obtain licenses before buying), riding boots, crops, ice-skates, roller-skates and radios, there was a rather attractive display of cowboy equipment for girls. Angie stared for a long time. She didn't like the designation of "Cowgirl Supplies," because somehow the word didn't ring right. "Cowgirl" sounded sort of dudish, while "cowboy" sounded authentic. The blouses in the window did not make her wish she had more than seventy-five cents. The so-called cowgirl blouses were two-toned creations, with arrows all over them, and padded shoulders. The colors struck her as being too noisy. Besides, she didn't like the chartreuse satin tie that went with the blouses. Dude stuff.

Come to think of it--what could she do with seventy-five cents? She paused at a tropical-fruit-drink stand and spent a nickel of her capital on a small (could it have been smaller?) glass of pineapple juice. It gave her an idea: Why not spend the rest of the money on lunch, a comfortable, inexpensive lunch, something more than just a sandwich and coffee, and less than a steak and onions? She could pick a handsome restaurant, go in, and eat alone. It would, she reasoned, give her poise. First of all, eating alone away from home always made her self-conscious, and second of all, it was something she had done perhaps only five or six times that she could remember. It would be

good experience, in case something ever happened that would call on the experience, like, for instance, having lunch with Mr. Lawton some day.

Well, was it impossible? Maybe he had been in a bad mood when she had seen him last, the Saturday after the Saturday. Maybe it was just that he had been in a hurry to keep an appointment. Ye Gods! She couldn't expect him to have a whole afternoon at his disposal every time she ran into him! The next time she saw him, she planned, she would act as if the dry, in-a-hurry Saturday had never happened. Maybe he would even ask her to call him Al again.

She strode on, keeping time with unspoken recitings:

"In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree:
Where Alph, the sacred river ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.
So twice five miles of fertile ground
With walls and towers--"

She stopped. It was a sea-food restaurant that she saw, and she paused to read the menu pasted on the window. Honest enough. They let you know in advance what to expect, so you didn't get stuck once you walked in.

Her eyes trailed down the right-hand side of the menu, and saw that nothing cost less than ninety cents, except things like tomato juice and fruit cocktail. Clams were a dollar. No. She marched on.

What came next?

"But O, that deep romantic chasm which slanted
Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!
A savage place! As holy and enchanted
As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
By woman wailing for her demon-lover!
And from this--"

Ha! They certainly had restaurants packed closely together on this street! They weren't so much as a stanza apart. Was this another sea-food house? No, it didn't seem so, although a small company of lobsters

was piled in a display-box. Peculiar-looking display--lobsters to the right, and an urn filled with bread-sticks in the center. To the left, there was an oversized spaghetti vat, steaming. There was no name on the window, but when Angie looked up at the maroon-striped awning, she read, "Gondola Gardens--the Finest in Italian Food!"

She walked on. She could eat Italian food at home, as she had told Tony when he had suggested it. Now, then--

"And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,
As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,
A mighty fountain momently was forced;
Amid whose swift, half-intermittent burst
Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,
Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail.
And 'mid these dancing rocks at once and ever
It flung up momently the sacred river.
Five miles meandering with a mazy motion
Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,
Then reached the caverns measureless to man,
And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean;
And 'mid this tumult Kublā heard from far
Ancestral voices prophesying war!"

Very, very good--very! She had been able to complete almost a full stanza without finding another restaurant. Very good!

She crossed the street, her walking rhythm momentarily interrupted by another "Watchyer step!" driver. This one said, "Keep your eyes open, damnit!" On the sidewalk again, she resumed:

"The shadow of the dome of pleasure
Floated midway on the waves;
Where was--"

What came next? No matter; she would look it up when she got home.

"A damsel with a dulcimer
In a vision once I saw,
It was an Abyssinian maid,
And on her dulcimer she played,
Singing of Mount Abora."

Here was a restaurant. There was no bill of fare pasted on the window, but there was a blue and gold sign reading "Special Today: Creamed Chicken, Mashed Potatoes, Roll and Butter--40¢" That would be

all right, if she wanted creamed chicken. Besides, it was something of a safeguard. If, when she walked in, she found that all other items in the place were very expensive, she could always fall back on the "Special Today." Then, a nickel, or probably a dime for coffee, and she was well within her splurge-budget. This was the restaurant in which she would eat, but she wasn't hungry yet. Perhaps a walk around the block--? She would come back after a walk. Besides, it wasn't even noon yet. The clock in front of the pawn shop down the street said 11:45. She walked.

She walked, trying to decide if she was hungry. At the next corner, she d ecided she wouldn't bother to walk around the block after all. But what, exactly what was a dulcimer? Musical instrument with strings? She remembered dimly Tony had mentioned something about little hammers on the strings. Dulcimer strings? No matter. She would look it up.

She retraced her steps, and entered the restaurant. It was very crowded, but she managed to find a small table, set for two, along the wall. She picked up the menu and observed that most of the items cost more than seventy cents. The safeguard would have to be used, so when the waitress came, Angie requested the creamed chicken, and coffee.

Then the miracle happened. A woman, who seemed to have been unsuccessful in her search for a seat, came over to Angie's table and asked if she might sit down, adding, apologetically, that there were no other empty tables. She was a rather tall, slender woman, dark-haired and brown-eyed. She wore a printed dress which Angie recognized as the kind of dress she herself might wear if she wore printed dresses. But that was not the miracle; the miracle was when Angie took a long, curious look at the woman's face, and saw that she was no other than Mr. Lawton's Sandy.

"Well, may I sit here?" the woman repeated.

"Of course," Angie answered, looking away quickly.

After a long, silent wait, the waitress brought Angie's lunch, and took the woman's order. Angie began to eat, meanderingly, wondering if she should say something to the person who was sharing her table. By the time the waitress returned with the woman's order, the silence had become unbearable to Angie. All at once, gripping her fork for moral support, she blurted out, "You're Sandy, aren't you?"

The woman looked up, very much surprised, and smiled, questioningly. "Yes, that's my nickname," she said. "B ut I don't recall ever meeting you." Angie gripped her fork even harder, trying to plan what she would say. Her mind was blanker than blank. The only thing she could do was forget to plan. "We never met each other," she said, "but I saw your picture once, and I'm sort of good at remembering faces."

Sandy lay down her spoon--she was eating soup--and looked at Angie, frankly bewildered. Angie, for her part, could think of nothing more to say, so she looked at Sandy's hand and saw that the fingernails were long, and painted a subdued shade. Then, Sandy and Angie stared at each other, appraisingly. Again, Angie could not bear the silence. "I saw your picture in someone's wallet," she explained. "Whose?" Sandy asked, in a friendly voice. "Mr. Lawton's," Angie answered, rushing on to make herself clear."You see, I live in the neighborhood where his office is, and I sort of got to know him, around the neighborhood, that is. One day, his wallet was open, and I happened to see your picture. So I asked him what your name was, and he said it was Sandy. And it's like I said, I remember faces."

Sandy grew cautious. "And how is Mr. Lawton?" she asked.

Angie grinned. "He's fine! He's very busy, and looks wonderful. The last time I saw him, he really looked swell!"

Sandy forgot her caution. "I see," she said. Then, in a voice Angie classified as "slightly nervous," Sandy added, "Has he been seeing you regularly?"

Angie wished she could say yes. She blushed. "Oh, no! I just bump into him once in a while, around the neighborhood. He's been working for the same company, the Caswell Company, ever since I first noticed him, at least a few months. But we don't go out with each other. It's like I said, I just bump into him here and there."

Sandy picked up her spoon, and held it poised. Angie forgot her Mamma-taught manners, and pointed with her finger. "Your soup's getting cold," she said, but Sandy did not seem to care. She asked Angie what her name was, and Angie told her, formally, using Angelina instead of the diminutive. The food on both plates grew cold, as both women made starts and stops at eating. Finally, Sandy pushed back the soup-bowl, and lit a cigarette. "Tell me," she asked, "do you expect to see Al--Mr. Lawton within the next few days?" Angie thought for a second. Well, she could manage to find him, with a little luck. "Well, there's a chance of it," she told Sandy.

Sandy puffed nervously at her cigarette. "Will you excuse me for a minute?" she asked. "I'll be back immediately. You will be here for a little while longer, won't you?" Angie nodded, and Sandy retired to the back of the restaurant, leaving her book on the chair.

Eating slowly, trying to sort out her thoughts, Angie finished a slice of bread, buttered all at once. First, Sandy had been only a picture in a wallet, no one to be feared, really. Then, Sandy had become someone Mr. Lawton avoided talking about. Then, now--Sandy was flesh and blood real, as real as the restaurant and the people walking the streets outside, as real as the island, maybe more so. She was alive, and not unfriendly, and, well, damned good-looking.

So what? So what, Angie wondered, so what? So Angie would see Mr. Lawton sooner or later, and, as a matter of honesty, she would have to tell him she had seen his friend. If she avoided telling him--? Well, why not? The way Sandy had been talking, it seemed that Mr. Lawton and the woman-in-his-wallet had not spent too much time together lately. Maybe they had had a fight. In that case, Mr. Lawton might never find out that Angie had seen Sandy--and maybe there would be other parks, other rowboats, other islands--

Sandy came back and dammed up the stream of Angie's thoughts. "Miss Tartrina," she said, "if you see Mr. Lawton in the next few days, will you give him a message from me?"

Angie squirmed. "OK," She said. "What is it?"

"Tell him I'm very sorry I wasn't at home to receive his phone-call, and that I'll try to get in touch with him soon."

"Oh."

"That's all. Tell him only that."

"O.K."

The waitress returned, harassed, impatient. "Will there be anything else?" she demanded. Sandy's eyes narrowed. "No," she said. "This will be all." Angie, before she could tell herself to mind her own business, blurted out, "Only soup?" Sandy nodded, and the waitress walked away, leaving two checks on the table.

Sandy stood up and Angie did the same, even though half the coffee in her cup was untouched. "Goodbye, Miss Tartrina," Sandy said. "This has been a surprise, but I'm pleased that it happened." "So long," Angie answered. "So long, Miss--what's your name? I can't call you Sandy if you call me Miss Tartrina." Sandy smiled, extending her hand. "I'm Sandra Monroe, but if you'll call me Sandy, I'll drop the Miss Tartrina. It seems to make you uncomfortable." Angie grinned. "O.K. It's a deal."

They left the restaurant together, saying goodbye outside the door. Angie promised again to deliver Sandy's message as soon as possible. She started towards the train station, wondering how old Sandy was. About thirty, she guessed. She also wondered how Mr. Lawton would react to the message. She experienced a strange fear in the form of a whispered inner voice that said there would be no more islands, no more Saturday afternoons, no more poetry memorized specifically for one person, no more joking about the picture in the wallet--in short, Angie had the strange, but somehow sure feeling that Mr. Lawton would be pleased with the message.

She would be as nonchalant as possible about it, she decided, lumpy-throated. So what if she felt like a martyr or something? "C'est la vie." Maybe--maybe Mr. Lawton would even like her for being the bearer of the news from Sandy. Maybe anything.

On the train going home, she tried to plan what she would say. There were no little boys on the way home, no truck drivers, nothing, only a bursting regret that she had chosen this particular day to leave the piano.

21.

Tony sat alone on the floor of the Tartina apartment, waiting for Angie to come home. It was Sunday night. Mamma had met him at the door, had let him in, had invited him to wait, saying that she was going to the movies, and Angie would be home shortly. Now, it was nine o'clock. Tony had been sitting there alone, stubbornly, for two hours, reading magazines. At about eight o'clock, he had gone into the bathroom where he had discovered Angie's private periodical library, in a pile on the hamper. He disliked most magazines, bur right now, he could not concentrate on a book.

It was good that Mamma had been home to let him in, although he might have gotten in anyway. "I'll leave the door unlatched for you, Tony--so you can come in and read until I get home," Angie had once offered, years ago. The practice had persisted, on and off, ever since then. Tony, likewise, had learned to leave the Collini door unlatched when he expected Angie to arrive, on rare occasions. Much to the annoyance of Mamma Tartrina and the parents of Tony, the doors of both apartments were periodically left unguarded. Nowadays, however, Tony frequently arrived to find Angie's door locked.

Nine o'clock. Two hours of waiting. Tony thrust aside the magazine he had been reading, and tried to analyze his impatience. He tried to compare his current anxiety to the kind of anxiety he might feel as he waited on a station platform for a train. Was it, he wondered, a letdown to espy the train's approach, heralded by two tiny lights in the tunnel's darkness? Was it better to perceive the station lights, only them, and play games with himself as he waited? Games such as: "I'll see the train by the time I buy two cents worth of peanuts," or

"I'll see the train by the time I walk to the extreme end of the platform," or, most frequently, "I'll see the train by the time I finish reading this chapter."

Somehow, the tiny lights and the train's oncoming always left him with a feeling of sadness, despite his desire to get where he was going. Ton y always fondled the notion, secretly and guiltily, that something might happen to a train for which he was waiting. He saw himself, then, climbing down onto the tracks, careful to avoid the electrified, treacherous third rail. He saw himself walking bravely into the tunnel, eventually finding the stranded train. Clearly, very detailedly, he saw all of his ensuing movements. He would smash a window, climb into the car and find the passengers suffocating. The engineer, in Tony's imagination, was always dead, slumped over the controls in his little cell-like driver's room. Tony did not like to think of the engineer dead, but it was fully vital to the fantasy. Tony would smash open all the windows, and give the choking passengers the benefit of the stale, underground air. "It's better than no air," he would tell them, authoritatively. Then, he would rush through the cars, leaving all the inbetween doors open, and revive the passengers by artificial respiration, a technique he remembered thoroughly. Following the ethics of lifesaving, he would be careful to revive women and children first.

Angie would be on the train. She, of course, would be the first to be revived. She would open grateful eyes to him, and he would take her in his arms, murmuring words of happiness because he had succeeded in making her conscious again.

Tony would explain to her in a strong, serious voice, what had happened on the train. He was not quite certain what had happened, but

he would not let this bother him. The rest of the story was more important, and the facts behind the accident were not, he felt, vital to the daydream.

Angie, he went on, would be too weak to help him as he worked on the other passengers. He wondered if he was imagining erroneously here. That girl had an almost limitless amount of energy. Anyway, he reasoned, she would be too weak to be of use. She would follow him about as he worked, her face gleaming worshipfully as he went about his one-man task. He would work with method and perfection, producing flawless, rapid revivals. Finally, all the passengers, now on their feet and capable of walking, would follow him, Indian-file, as he led them precariously along the ledge until they passed the limits of the train. Then, they would walk along the tracks, while Tony cautioned them to beware of the third rail. He would keep Angie close to him, holding her hand to insure her safety. It would be impossible to put an arm around her and maintain the Indian-file.

He and his band of grateful adorers would be met at the train station by reporters, policemen and subway executives. His attempts at explanation would be gloriously obscured by the loud, praising voices of those whose lives he had saved. When the newspaper cameramen snapped pictures, Tony's arms would be around Angie. The newspapers, the following morning, would carry the picture of a smiling, idolizing Angie, stargazing at a lean, dark, modest Tony.

He was not so banal as to carry the reverie further. He did not transport himself to a description of the newspaper's verbal contents. He did not even envision the captions. Not once did he even consider the word <u>hero.</u> The dreams, then, ended with a flash of the camera's bulb.

Tony arose from his reverie, and went to get a glass of water. He returned with the glass and sat down on the floor again. He thought, next of the impatience he felt while waiting for Angie to come home. He concluded that he couldn't contrast the two experiences, because he wanted Angie to arrive home, and he didn't ever want the train to come. He realized that Angie's hand on the downstair's doorknob would at once heighten his anticipation, and render him free of anxiety. He remembered nights he had waited for her, near to dinnertime, waiting, listening quietly to the sound of the downstairs door opening and closing, hearing the apartment house at dusk reclaiming its own. He knew every sound--the door was pushed open in a dozen different ways; the steps were ascended by many pairs of feet, some trudging, some walking briskly, and some clumping wearily. He knew Angie's ascent by the combined rumble-creak of the staircase as she almost flew up to the second landing. He even could recognize her individual manner of pushing open the door, the swift, almost audible flip of the wrist, the shoving at the door with her foot, the boisterous thrust of Angie into the hallway.

Tony often wondered how Angie could be so sensitive a musician, and at the same time so thumpingly noiseful in other matters. Before the summer, he recalled, he had criticized her freely. "Angie," he would say. "I think you actually enjoy being a bull in a china shop," or "You do enjoy making a lot of noise, don't you?" She would, as a matter of custom, laugh at him in answer, accusing him of being too delicate for his own good. Sometimes, rarely, she would scowl. Once, she had said, "Tony, you just don't understand!" He had become angry, and sullen, embarking on a lecture aimed at analyzing what people meant when they said, "You don't understand!" "It's a rather childish practice," he had said, with forced severity, whereupon Angie, scowl deepended, had

shouted, "I hate you, Tony!" She had gone off in a flurry of grimaces and hisses.

Perhaps he didn't understand. But why was she so temperamental? That dratted word again! Certainly, if he didn't understand her, how could anyone else? He had known her ever since he had become aware of the fact that others besides his parents, lived in the world. What was the mystery? Jonah said girls liked to be mysterious to make up for their deficiencies. Jonah hadn't put it that way, exactly: he had said something about girls liking to be mysterious because they never had anywhere near as much fun out of life as men had. But why did Angie have to act so omnipotent when she voiced that "You don't understand" complaint?

Perhaps he had better leave the apartment, see Angie another time, tomorrow or Tuesday. No good. He had waited too long to leave now.

There it was! The flip of the wrist (almost audible), the kick at the door, the entry of Angie downstairs. Up the stairs. Zoom! Tony, likewise, zoomed.

Here she was, very pretty and very scowling. "Tony Collini!" she cried. "What are you doing here?" Tony crossed his legs, Hindu fashion. He would be calm; he would be the man in his train-accident reverie; he would be adamant.

"Sit down, Angie!"

"It's my house. You don't have to tell me to sit down."

"I was being polite."

"So be polite."

"Angie--?"

"What can I do for you?"

"Nothing, drat it!"

"Take it easy!"

"Angie, for godsakes, how can I take it easy when you're acting like a prima donna?"

"That settles it! Tony, go home, please. I want to go to sleep!"

Tony's adamance departed, waving bye-bye. Tony got up from the floor and sat down in an armchair. "Angie," he said, gently. "If something bad has happened to you today, and you're in a lousy mood, I'll understand. Do you want to talk to me?"

Angie slipped off her shoes and wiggled her toes. "Nothing bad happened today," she said, without antagonism. "Well, Tony, how've you been?"

Tony took a deep breath. "Fine!" he said. "Wonderful. Except that I've been looking for you all week, and you've been who-knows-where."

"Oh," said Angie. "I've been wandering around, no place in particular."

She handed him an apple. "By the way, Tony, did you happen to see Mr. Lawton around the neighborhood in the last few days?"

"No. Have you?"

"No. That's why I asked you. I just thought it was sort of curious that he wasn't around."

"How do you know he hasn't been around?"

"I haven't seen his car in front of Caswell Company."

"Perhaps he's been taking the train to work."

"I didn't think of that."

"Anyway, Angie, what are you so interested about?"

"Just curious."

"Why?"

"You know--I get sort of used to cars in front of buildings and all that."

"I don't."

"Well, I'm different."

"You certainly are!"

He glanced idly around the room. "Angie," he began, "do you want to take a walk? We could go over and say hello to Jonah. He's baby-sitting for a neighbor tonight, asked me to sit with him, but I told him I was coming over here. Last week, you said you liked it when the three of us were together. I'd rather not, but it's up to you."

Angie pulled the pits out of the apple. "I thought Jonah had a job. Is he trying to make some extra money?"

"I guess so."

"What's he need that extra money for?"

Tony flushed. He changed the subject. "Well, how about the walk? It's cool outside."

"I know. I just came in, remember?"

"Could I ever forget?"

Angie swallowed the apple pits. "Tony--remember the night we found Mr. Lawton in his car?"

Tony remembered. "You mean when he was drunk?"

"If you want to put it that way."

"He was, you know."

"All right, so he was drunk. Do you remember when I took out his wallet, to find his address?"

"Uh huh."

"Did you see the picture in it?"

"What picture?"

"You don't remember any picture in the wallet?"

"No."

"Oh."

Tony put his apple core into an ashtray. "What about the picture?" he asked. "Nothing," Angie said. "Only, if you saw a picture for a

minute, and then met someone a few months later, would you know it was the same person, if you'd only seen the picture for a minute?"

Tony considered it. "I'm not much of a detective," he said, "but I guess I'd remember. What's your point, though?"

"No point. I was just asking, random-like."

"UH huh."

"How's your father feeling?"

"Better, thanks. He misgauges his capacities, sometimes, keeps going until he almost drops on his feet."

"He's a vigorous man, Tony. Everyone admires him for it."

"He certainly is."

Tony went to the piano and picked up the calendar Angie had mixed in with her sheet music. "The summer is going fast," he commented. "It's almost gone."

Angie nodded, with a sigh. "Yes," she said. "It's funny. I feel a million years older than I did when we walked home from the party that night."

"So do I," Tony said. "I don't quite know why, though. Nothing really spectacular has happened."

Angie tied her left shoelace. "No," she said, "but a lot of little things add up." She went to the window, pulled up the sagging shade, and looked out. Tony was about to get up and go to her, but her reconsidered, and remained seated.

"Tony--"

"What?"

"What are we all going to be doing in the fall?"

"You know. Unless you've changed your mind about Music School."

"No."

"Well, you'll be there; Jonah's going to get another job--he doesn't

like the one he has, says it's a blind-alley job; me, I'm going to college, here in the city. I don't want to leave home."

"You shouldn't--not with your father needing you every once in a while."

"That's only part of it."

"Oh?"

"You know the other part, don't you?"

"No, what?"

"Angie, you know, of course you do."

"No, why?"

"I don't want to be too far away from you."

"Oh."

Angie went into the kitchen, saying, "I'm going to make some coffee for us, and there's a box of doughnuts here. I'll call you when I finish."

Tony followed her. "Mind if I stay here while you make the coffee? I've spent enough time alone in that living-room of yours. It got so I could close my eyes and see the colors in the wallpaper without even concentrating." He sat down at the table, and nibbled on a doughnut. He spilled the remaining doughnuts onto a plate, obtained two paper napkins from the wall holder, and put them on the table, folded. "Domestic, aren't you?" Angie asked, not maliciously. Tony finished his doughnut. "I'm housebroken," he said.

"Ah hah!" Angie said. "Jonah's influence, no doubt."

Tony shook his head. "No. Strictly original."

"See--there--that 'strictly'--that's a pet expression of Jonah's."

"Is it? I hadn't noticed."

"You should be more observant."

"By the way, Angie. This is something I meant to ask you for a long time."

"About what?"

"About Jonah."

"What about him?"

"This is going to sound silly, I'm afraid, but I'll ask it anyway. If I weren't around, do you think you might be seeing more of Jonah than you do?"

"I don't think so. Why do you ask?"

"I don't know, Angie. It's just that with you acting queer this summer, I started wondering if perhaps you were interested in someone else?"

"What made you think it had to be Jonah?"

"I don't know, Angie. It's just that you've been seeing Jonah and me more than other people. Is there anyone?"

"Let's forget it."

She poured the coffee, and sat down at the table. "Tony," she said. "Have you decided what you're going to study?" Tony glanced up, shyly. "I was thinking of law," he said. Angie appeared shocked. "But you're too shy for that, Tony!" she said. "I always thought you'd go into something else, something better suited to you!"

Tony thought of his train-accident reverie, and winced. "So I won't be the bombastic kind of lawyer," he said. "There are other kinds."

"Yes," said Angie. "You'll be the cool, serious kind."

When a knock sounded at the door, Angie ran to answer it. She came back with Jonah following her. "Hi, Tony-boy," the newcomer said. Tony raised his hand. "Hi."

As Angie was about to pour a cup of coffee for Jonah, he waved her off. "Nope, baby--I'm stuffed to the gills with soda. That family I sat for--they cut the financial payment and padded it with bottles of pop. Bughouse! You know, this baby-sitting is not for me. I go nuts all evening sitting around. I can't play the radio too loud, or the baby squawks, and I can't bring fellows in for a card game or they'll make too much noise. That house is strictly a morgue. Either of you two want to take over next time they call me?"

He was answered by a pair of shaking heads. He went on: "No kidding, though, it's an easy business. All you have to do is sit. Sit! That's all, sit! They pay you for just sitting. What could be sweeter?"

Tony and Jonah shook their heads some more. Jonah clucked his tongue. "Tsk tsk! Such rich people, you two--can't stand the thought of making some money! You, Tony-boy--wouldn't you like your wallet bulging with money? And you, Tart, think of all the extra music you could buy! Blah! You'd think I was trying to hire you out to a T.N.T. factory instead of a nice, simple, innocent, baby-sitting job. What kind of pals are you anyway? Strictly fair-weather. Get the old chain rusty waiting for you two to come through. And it's strictly the right job for either of you. You two do a lot of reading, so you'd while away the time like nobody's business. Me, I get dizzy in the head if I have to sit and read all night."

No answer. "Look," he continued, whipping a harmonica out of his pocket. "I got so hard up for something to do that I bought this and took it along with me. I play fairly softly so that pesky infant won't wake up. I can make myself softer than a radio turned low. Want to hear?"

Tony and Angie expressed surprise, one voice superimposed upon the other. Jonah guffawed at them, stood up and made a mock bow. He played

for them, a strange, mournful tune, played only on the melody line. Angie broke in, "What about the accompaniment?"

Jonah put the harmonica away from his mouth for a second. "I haven't gotten that far, yet," he explained.

There was a rap on the wall, timid. All wall-raps had been timid since Angie had met Mrs. Kuller's mother. Angie motioned Jonah to stop playing. "It is sort of late," she said.

The evening began to wear thin. The steam of conversation between Angie and Tony had been broken. Somehow, with the addition of Jonah, even the old, comradely Three Musketeers' spirit could not be revived. Conversation became a dialogue between Tony and Jonah while Angie washed the coffee cups, and thought about Mr. Lawton and Sandy. After a while, the vague look on Angie's face was seen by Tony who decided not to run the risk of spoiling a partially-good evening. He motioned to Jonah, and the boys left.

22.

One morning, while Angie was walking, she saw Lawton come up the subway steps and rush into his office building. There was no time for her to speak to him; they waved at each other and that was all. However, it explained the absence of Mr. Lawton's car. Angie reasoned that the car was probably being repaired, and at least now she knew that Mr. Lawton was still in the neighborhood.

Somewhat brightened, she returned home and tried to practice. The day was too hot, too drenched with a late summer languor for her to drag herself to work. She had skipped breakfast, and now she was hungry, and not hungry. There was a dull-skinned apple sitting all by itself in the bowl on top of the piano. Angie reached for it, bit deeply into its tepid roundness, and encountered half a worm. She spat wildly, and sat for a moment contemplating nausea. Tony had once said that there was only one thing worse than biting into an apple and finding a worm, and that was to bite into an apple and find half of a worm. She ran into the kitchen, and spat again, in the sink this time. Then, holding the remainder of the apple in her left hand, she opened the window with her right, and looked down into the back alley. She threw the apple out, her nostrils quivering with revulsion. She spat after it, feeling crawly-mouthed. Apple, half-worn, and saliva landed in the center of the back alley. Too late, Angie saw that one of her neighbors was hanging clothes in the back-yard joining the alley. She tried to duck back into the kitchen, but the neighbor saw her, and shook her head, condemningly. A few minutes later, Angie saw the neighbor talking to another woman, pointing up at Angie's window and making experienced expressions of loathing with her mouth.

Returning to the piano, Angie decided for the third time that it was

impossible to practice. She changed from sweated shirt to a cotton blouse, and left the house, heading towards the library. It was the only cool place in the neighborhood, except for the park. In the library, she browsed through the stacks, flipping her finger idly over the rows of books, book-book-book-book like a picket fence.

Except for Angie, and the greyhaired librarian in the hairnet, busily straightening her desk, the library was empty. A stack of newly-returned books was on the corner table in a jumbled pile. Angie went to the stack, looked at a few titles, and took three books with her to her reading table. She inspected the first and last pages of each, read a paragraph or two, and pushed the books aside.

Angie was fond of the library; she called it the "oasis" because it had an adjustable climate. In the winter, it was cozily warm, and in the summer, it was cool, so cool that Angie wished she had the piano with her. In this room, shaded by trees, she could work. Her table was the heavy oak one nearest the back window. She felt it belonged to her after years of occupation. Now, she slipped her hand beneath the table, her fingers seeking the spot where long ago she had carved her initials. It had been a dangerous and tedious job, accomplished in three instalments, with much surreptitiousness. She ran her fingers fondly over the letters. She sat up startled as she felt another pair of initials beneath them. Whose? She deliberately dropped her pencil, bent to retrieve it, and looked up at the alien carving. The letters were A.C. Who was--? They couldn't belong to a stranger. They were set in perfect alignment under her own initials.

She sat up, suddenly knowing who. A. C. was Anthony Collini! Tony! When, she wondered, when in the world, when had he discovered her hiding-place? When had he carved his initials? They might have been there for years, for all she knew. Tony had never said a word about them. Just

like Tony to wait until she would mention it. Poor, dear Tony--always around, always available.

Angie sat quietly, drinking in the coolness. She watched the librarian who had finished with dusting and had moved to the returned-books table where she was assorting the books.

The telephone rang. The librarian went to answer it. Angie listened to the phone conversation:

"Brockwood Branch...One moment, please, I'll see if we have it... Yes, we have it, but it 's out at present...No, we can't make reservations by mail...Yes, you will have to come in and fill out a card... No, the rule cannot be broken...The book is due back on the thirtieth... No, there are no other calls for it at present...Yes, you simply fill out a card, reservation card...Yes...No, we will not be open after six... Yes, Goodbye."

The librarian returned to her sorting job. The phone rang again:

"Brockwood Branch...Please repeat that...I am very sorry, but I did not hear your question...Yes...Oh! Certainly not! The Library definitely does not allow young girls to borrow eugenics books...You say that our stamp is on the book?...Please examine the child's card... Yes...It is possible that she borrowed it on someone else's...The book is on her card?...How old is the child?...Thirteen? Hmmm...Does she look older than her age?...That explains it!...We regret this...Please return the book at once. It is contrary to our policy to have it in the hands of a child of thirteen...Yes, anytime today...We close at six... Please tell the child to be more careful in the future...If repeated, we may be forced to revoke her card...Yes, until six...No. Goodbye."

Adjusting her hairnet, the librarian returned once more to her sorting job. A few minutes passed quietly, and then the phone rang again. The librarian, with an exasperated glance at the phone, let it

ring. It seemed persistent. She gave in:

"Brockwood Branch...Books about George Bernard Shaw? Yes, we have several...No, I cannot vouch for the authenticity of the anecdote...No... No, I cannot look it up for you...No. Yes, he became a vegetarian many years ago...No...Yes...Certainly, I shall help you when you come to the branch...No, no books by mail. So sorry...You may return them by mail, however...No...No...Yes...Try the newspaper information service... Yes, I believe he discredits the "George," and calls himself by his middle name...I am not certain...That's quite all right...Very sorry... Yes...Goodbye."

The librarian hung up, sighing, and started towards the sorting table, walking slowly, as if she expected to be interrupted before she arrived. Halfway to the table, the phone rang again. The librarian turned to it; it stopped ringing.

Angie got up and went over to the sorting table. "You're busy today," she told the librarian, "with all that phone-ringing. Let me sort these for you. I know how."

The librarian readjusted her hairnet. "But it isn't allowed, dear," she said. Angie shrugged her shoulders. "But I can help you; nobody will know about it." The librarian saw that Angie's offer was sincere. "All right," she told the girl, "but please don't tell anyone about this." Angie assured her that she wouldn't. They smiled at each other, and set about stacking the books. Carl Sandburg's Songbag fell to the floor. Angie scooped it up, dusted it with her elbow, and lay it aside to take home. Sandburg and Walt Whitman were somehow connected in her mind, so when she came across a copy of Leaves of Grass, she piled it on top of the Songbag.

For a full hour, the librarian and Angie worked together, and stopped only when all the newly-returned books were back on the shelves. The

only comments the librarian made concerned the watching of the numerical order. At first she said, "The Dewey Decimal Syste ," which Angie had not understood, but when she translated it, Angie nodded. They broke labor in good humor. Angie noticed that the librarian did not look as harassed as she had when Angie had entered. When the phone rang again, the librarian answered it in a mild, sweet, friendly, unstrained voice. Angie felt like a girl scout.

As Angie was preparing to leave, the librarian stopped her. "Young lady," she said, "I hope you won't consider me improper for making a personal comment about you."

"No," Angie said. "Go right ahead."

The librarian patted Angie on the cheek. "I wish to say this. I've seen you come in and out of my library for years. You were one of the many faces grown familiar with time. Today, I see you in a new light. You are no longer a young tomboy, and, incidentally, I know about the initials you carved under that table. You are a young lady now, and I hope to know you for many happy years."

Angie went home feeling better.

.....

An hour later, in her bedroom, she threw herself on the bed; it creaked. She was restless. She climbed off the bed and opened the top drawer of the bureau. Digging deep among the sweaters, gloves, stockings, socks and unassorted underwear, she pulled out a long red envelope stuffed with the programs of the Music School's concerts as far back as five years. Back on the bed, Angie shuffled through the programs, playing with recaptured memories. Angie had performed the last three concerts uncomfortably. She wished that she hadn't been on the

programs. There was something so silly, she thought, about half-baked students getting up and trying to act like professionals.

The Music School believed it wise to instill a sense of professionalism in their students at as early an age as possible, Angie had been told. Therefore, the young students were taught little mannerisms, little performance techniques to cover the rough surfaces. All musicians were taught how to walk out on stage, and how to retreat, how to establish admirable audience contact, how to acknowledge the audience, yet remain detached. "Detachment," Angie's teacher had told her, "is something for you to look like you're feeling, whether or not you actually do." The students were taught how to lose consciousness of the audience, so as to be able to immerse themselves in the music.

The School, Angie remembered, was always careful to keep the students from developing affected mannerisms, obviously affected ones, of course. For instance, pianists who took to raising curved hands unnecessarily high above the keyboard were gently reprimanded. Angie had never fallen into that habit, but another one of her teacher's pupils had. Angie had stumbled into their lesson, and had heard her teacher say, "That high-raising technique is overly dramatic!" Angie remembered, and abstained. The violinists usually had a difficult time at their first concerts. They had to be told to never, never end a piece abruptly. They were instructed, instead, to hold the bow on the strings for a short moment after completion, and then to gently lift the bow, and just as gently lift the violin from the shoulder. As for nods and bows to applause--they had to be discreet and conservative, and waving to parents and friends was tabooed.

Angie thought of all these things now, and wondered why she remembered them in such detail in theory, and forgot them so swiftly in practice. That graduation performance at the high school...such a long

time ago!

That was what she was afraid of, Angie thought--remembering things in theory only. Take for instance the next time she would see Mr. Lawton. She had a message to deliver, and it was going to be delivered casually, or bust! But would she be able to do it that way? She doubted it, but she would try.

And then--well, things never happened right. This business of looking forward to something--anticipation--it was a face and body sort of fronting for a free-rein mind, imagining, all the time imagining something before it happened. How did things work out? By the mere transfer of a body from one room to another, or maybe from a room to an island, by the simple addition of one or more people, only one in this case, Mr. Lawton, by the changing of now to perhaps a few hours from now, or maybe tomorrow, would the before become the during, the will be become the is, and finally, the during become it happened once.

It would happen exactly the way she planned, she hoped. She would find him, and he would say, and she would say, and he would say, and they would sit down, and they would stand up. Then, they would be very quiet, and he would say, and she would say, and he would understand. Then, they would walk, and if he saw someone he knew, he would tip his hat, and she would be very proud because then it would be for all the world to see that she was his friend.

Oh, this was silly! All she was going to do was deliver a simple little message from Sandy! Why all the brain-breaking over it? Why didn't she just take a nap and forget it? She tried, and fell asleep, almost two hours later, to the sound of Mrs. Kuller's radio.

...

23.

Saturday morning had an indefinable smell of autumn in it, although autumn was a few weeks off. There was a cool breeze through the city, and something more, the feel of rain in the air, and yet the promise that there would be no rain. It was almost cool enough for a sweater. In the streets, people found their hair blowing.

Angie woke up at ten, sniffed the air, and thought it was some sort of magic. Taking advantage of the change in climate, she ate a quick breakfast and practiced until one o'clock. She would have to put off a trip to Max's in search of Mr. Lawton. She hadn't practiced well all week, and it would be almost a sin not to take advantage of today. After all, she had a lesson scheduled for Tuesday morning, and if she was interested in a scholarship, she would be foolish to let her work lag.

If only she could see Mr. Lawton! Better than that, if only she could get to know him, in some sort of way where they could be permanent friends, where she could phone him when she wanted to talk to him, where she could always call him Al, where she could introduce him to people as a friend. If she could have all of that, she would not feel too badly about the presence of Sandy in his life. This was no good; she had to practice.

She did. At one o'clock, Tony walked in, cool and smiling, carrying a wrapped phonograph record. "Hello," he said. "I have an idea. You like that place Max's, and I just noticed he has watermelon with ice cream, special today. How about coming over with me?"

Angie closed the piano lid. "But it isn't hot today, Tony."

"So? Does it have to be hot? Watermelon and ice cream is good even if it is a little cooler."

"I suppose so."

"Sure. Come on."

"Wait until I put on my shoes. I've been barefooted all morning."

"I noticed."

"You shouldn't have looked. By the way, what record have you there?"

"Debussy--'The Afternoon of a Faun.'"

At two o'clock, practicing forgotten, Angie and Tony seated themselves at a corner table in Max's near the Juke Box. The Box, multicolored and gaudy, was playing its usual loud, garish music. Angie and Tony were almost unaware of the music which became part of a general noise-pattern and faded into the heard-but-not-listened-to status of all accustomed noises. The strains on the elevated structure a few streets away came and went. Max's cash register's drawers opened and closed bangingly. The dishes clattered. The cutlery jangled. The few other people in the restaurant talked, sometimes whispered, sometimes shouted. Max blared orders to Louie. Mashed potatoes slopped audibly onto plates. The grill sizzled its bacon and eggs. The Juke Box, bribed with nickel after nickel, played raucously on.

All these sounds were taken for granted by Angie, and less so by Tony. Angie thought of all sounds in the restaurant as falling into a sort of common gossip, one with another, and swirling about, all of them, becoming an active, but unattended background. Even the Juke Box, a dominant noise, became something far away and not to be cared about. Today was magic, Angie thought, not island-magic, but a sort of natural earthly magic. She felt herself capable of banishing sounds at will.

Eventually, Tony became aware of the Box. Angie and Tony chatted over the watermelon and icecream, and forgot about the ugly, shiny Juke

Box until about one second after it quite suddenly broke down in the middle of a song.

"The machine busted!" announced Max to Louie. Max wiped his hands on his apron, and walked pompously over to the box. "I fix," he said, poking his hand into the grey-white, grease -splattered pocket of his apron, and extracting a nickel. "I fix," he said, with a nod to Angie and Tony, thinking that their deposited nickels were at stake. "I fix!" he said with finality, slipping his nickel into the slot, and shoving the lever in with such ferocity that the machine seemed to tremble. "We try it now!" Max commanded, thumping the side of the machine, as if it were a friend who needed coercion.

It didn't work. Louie dialed for the repairman, but Max, impatient, wrenched the phone out of Louie's hand. "Hello...this Max's Restaurant... Yeh...you know address...Yah, crazy machine, it broke...Right away?... Yah...Quick!"

"He come?" asked Louie.

"Yeh!" said Max. "He say he coming here for check today anyway. Be here any minute." He gave the Juke Box one final, angry push, and returned to the counter.

Angie tapped Tony on the arm. "See that?" she asked. "See the way Max just pushed the Box? Well, I'll bet that the Box doesn't even mind that, because it's suffered so much already, spiritually. What's a physical hurt when the Juke Box has been hurt by never being able to hear what it wants to hear? Right now, the Box looks as if it's saying that no matter what happens to it, it still won't play any more swing music."

Tony wasn't listening to her. "Angie," he said, staring at his watermelon, "there's something I promised myself I'd tell you today, no matter what happened. It's this: I love you--very much, and I want you to know it."

"Some other time," Angie said. "Right now, the Juke Box is very important. Look at the way it's protesting--shaking and shivering. Poor Box!"

Tony continued to stare at the watermelon. The Box went on vibrating, watched by Angie, Max and Louie. Max, inbetween hamburgers, sent cold stares towards the Box, while he kept watching the door to see if the repairman had arrived.

"Angie," Tony repeated, "aren't you listening to me? Did you hear what I said?"

"Yes," she answered. "But look at that Box!" Tony shoved his watermelon away. "Angie--" he said. She said "Shhh..." as the repairman came in, a tow-headed young man with a clam-shut smile in a calm face. He was greeted by an excited Max. "Machine very strange!" Max said. "Act like crazy stubborn mule, shake by herself!"

The repairman pulled a small, grease-covered pad from his pocket. "Ever have trouble with it before?" he asked, flipping through the notebook.

"No trouble before," Max assured him.

"Electricity in this place working all right?" the repairman asked. Max nodded vigorously. "Everything fine!" he said. "Everything except that stupid lummox machine!"

The repairman balanced his burning cigarette on the edge of a table, and examined the machine. Five minutes later, he turned around and almost banged heads with the curious, anxious Max who had been hovering over him, steadily bending lower and lower. "The machine's all right," the repairman said. "I tightened a few screws, just in case." With a nickel from Max, he tried the machine. Nothing happened.

Max gave the Box a merciless shove, and retired behind the counter. The Juke Box, in response, let forth a noise that sounded very much like

a weird but pitiful human growl.

"Sounds like a battlecry for a revolution or something, doesn't it?" Angie asked Tony. "I," he said, "don't give a damn. Pathetic fallacy at a time like this--when I'm trying to tell you what you mean to me?"

Angie went on, entranced. "Supposing," she said, "that this particular Juke Box doesn't like Swing music. Look at what it had to endure--someone comes along, throws in a nickel, and the poor Box has to slide the phonograph record in place, set the needle going its crazy round trip--sheer torture if the Box hates swing!"

Tony pushed back his chair. "Angie, I won't have enough strength to go through this again. You'll have to listen to me now!"

"In a minute," Angie said. "Now--how could the Box rebel against swing? No ordinary way. So all the Box can do is simply stop playing! Can't you just hear the Box saying, 'No more swing music, no more!'"

Tony glared at the table. "All I can hear," he said, "is myself reaching an explosion point!"

"Well, explode later," Angie told him. "Look, let me have the record you bought. I bet right now the Box wants to hear some Debussy. Maybe even the one you have--'The Afternoon of a Faun.' I bet right now the Box is ashamed of itself for being such a genuflecting slave all this time, playing the music it can't stand."

"Come on home," Tony said.

"No. Not yet," Angie told him. "Let me finish. Maybe, when the Juke Box was being made, one of the factory workers whistled some Debussy, and only this Box heard and cared."

Tony picked up the check, and stood up, ready to leave. "Angie," he said softly, "listen to me for a minute. Your story is very charming, but

right now, part of me says if I don't make you listen to me, I might as well give up. Are you coming home?"

"No," Angie said. "But leave me the record." Tony put it on the table, turned and walked out, leaving a curious, but not unduly concerned Angie.

Max asked the repairman if he would try the Box "just one more time." The repairman refused. "Enough is enough. You'll get a new Box. We guarantee it with every rental." "But--" began Max. "No buts!" the repairman said, looking for reassurance at Angie who had come to his table, record in hand. "Miss," he said, "tell our friend Mr. Proprietor here that he doesn't have to worry about the old Box." Angie smiled. "Maybe," she said, timidly, "it's the fault of the records. Maybe they're damaged--and I have a brand-new one right here with me. Try it, huh?"

"Nope," the repairman said. "According to my story here in this little book, all the records were installed less than a week ago. They're in fine condtion! Top notch!"

"Just an experiment?" Angie persisted.

"Nope," the repairman said, writing out his report. "Young lady, I know my business. I've been handling Jukes for over five years, and before that, I was an auto mechanic. I know machines--all kinds of them!"

Angie unwrapped her record. "Here," she said, "just try it."

"Yah!" Max broke in. "Try!"

"What the hell," the repairman grunted. "I'll humor you. Give me the record."

He opened the Box, and inserted the record from the back. As he worked, a hush pervaded the restaurant. Most of the customers were gone. Only the repairman, Angie, Max and Louie hovered around the Box. At the

front of the store, two men were finishing sandwiches. Max and Louie watched the repairman anxiously. Angie's face was tranquil; she was convinced that the Box would play. The records were stacked; the nickel was deposited; no one breathed.

The room was suddenly filled with music. The Juke Box, as if throbbing with happiness, played perfectly, its notes pure, round, rich, bringing Debussy's forest and erotic faun to the smoky, begrimed eatery. "I'll be darned!" the repairman exclaimed. "Listen to it go!" Max thumped Angie on the back. "No more busted!" he said. Angie smiled.

When the record was finished, the repairman took it out and returned it to Angie. He slipped in another nickel. "Now we'll hear some swing," he said, as if ordering an orchestra leader to play. Angie shook her head. "It won't work with swing," she said. The repairman laughed at her, plunged in the lever, and waited. Nothing happened. He tried again, and once more. "This settles it," he said. "It's just a freak Box. The truck'll pick it up Monday. That's all there is to it!" He picked up his tool-kit and left the restaurant.

Max transferred his anger to a loaf of rye bread which he cut with a large, scimitar-like knife. He said nothing, only sawed away at the loaf, slice after slice, his eyes fixed on the bread, his mouth turned down at the corners, not even looking up as the repairman left. Finally, he lay aside the knife, and stacked the bread in slapdash fashion. Louie, watching him, slinked out of the way, going to the extreme end of the counter, busying himself cleaning the blackened griddle.

Angie took Tony's record and walked out, after a farewell look at the Juke Box. On the way, she wondered what would happen to the Box at the factory , the poor nonconformist Juke Box, the rebel. It would probably be demolished, she decided, broken into a million pieces as punishment for

its uprising.

After she had spent a half-hour at the piano, she remembered that Tony had walked out on her, angrily. He had never done that before!

But no matter, no matter, she decided, nothing to worry about. He would be back. He couldn't stay away. Hadn't he said, many, many times, that he would always be around, whether she needed him or not? "You can count on me, Angie," he would say, although she always assured him there was nothing she needed help for, ever. "I can take care of myself," she would say, had been saying for years.

He would come back, she knew. If only she could be as sure of Mr. Lawton!

24.

Angie, waiting for the mailman on the Monday morning following the Juke Box incident, found herself toying with the idea of eating a sort of midmorning breakfast. She discarded the thought before it broke into details. Overweight seemed to run in the family, Angie remembered. No sense developing bad habits. She ate an apple. It was mealy. Stubbornly, she forced it down anyway.

It was her own fault. Mamma had warned her about apples in late summer. They weren't good this time of year, Mamma had said, and there was no sense in buying them. But Angie had insisted that Mamm continue buying them. After all, what else was there to nibble on if one didn't want to put on weight? Crackers? No--they were fattening--four of them equalled a slice of bread, calorically. Plums? Too sour, unless you bought the really expensive ones. Cherries? Too many pits, pits that accumulated in the mouth, until you found yourself crunching them in rhythm to piano-music. Apples? In general, wonderful. So what if they were off-season once in a while?

Angie threw the second apple out of the window. It was brown inside.

She wondered if Tony was working this morning. By evening, he would probably be ready to come over and apologize for walking out on her at Max's.

The mailman arrived, and Angie ran downstairs to meet him. He ignored her, busying himself putting the brown leather sack on the floor of the vestibule. "Anything for Tartrina?" Angie asked. The mailman sucked his teeth, and shook his head. "I don't think so," he said, flipping through the letters. Angie turned to go back upstairs. "Here's

one," the mailman said, extending a long, white envelope. Angie seized it, thinking it was from the Music School. She threw an abrupt "Thanks!" to the front door, and scooted up the steps.

Back on her couch, she inspected the envelope. It was addressed to "Mr. Joseph Tartrina," and the return address indicated a men's clothing store chain. Disgusting! All these years her father had been dead, and the crazy stores still had his name on their mailing lists. Angie felt a mixture of anger, repugnance and sorrow. Maybe, though, it was better that she, not Mamma had seen the letter. If Mamma saw the letter, addressed to her dead husband, she might cry, not while Angie would be watching, but later, when no one could see. It hurt Angie to see the name on the envelope, but it was better that it hurt her rather than Mamma.

Funny--when it came to talking about how she felt about her dead father, Tony was the only one who understood what she said. More than that--he was the only one she talked to about it. Maybe tonight, if Tony came to the house, she would tell him about the letter, cautioning him not to tell Mamma, of course.

Angie ripped open the envelope, inspected a four-page brochure of assorted photographs of well-dressed men, interlaced with flashy text. Angie was about to tear up the paper when she saw a picture of a man wearing a seersucker suit. The price was $27.50. Angie remembered that she had made fun of Tony's seersucker suit, calling it a "pajama cloth suit," and now she felt sorry. It was expensive, wasn't it, especially for something that looked like crinkle-cloth pajamas? Poor Tony must have felt terrible--spending so much money for a suit, and then having to be laughed at. He had been nice about it, though. Someone else might have been glum all evening after it.

What if the Music School didn't give her the scholarship? She would still practice, still take lessons, work hard, and keep hoping. But what kind of job would she get? Doing what? How much time would it take? Would she have any energy left at night for practicing? How much practicing could she do at night? But with the scholarship and a part-time job--

It would come; she knew it. Mamma had faith in it. Tony, too.

What time did the afternoon mail arrive? About two-thirty, she remembered. It wasn't even ten-thirty yet! What kind of day would this be--sitting around, waiting for the mail? What about practicing? Right!

At twelve-thirty, partially satisfied, she closed the piano lid, slipped into a skirt, combed her hair, and went out for a walk, heading towards Max's. If through the window, she saw Mr. Lawton inside, she would walk away. If, however, he were not there, she would go in and order pie and milk--apple pie. Besides, things were a little different now between her and Max, after the sharing of the Juke Box headache. Max wouldn't mind if she sat around a little longer than the time necessary for drinking a glass of milk.

As she passed the Caswell Company building, Lawton stepped into her path, walking rapidly, a big, warm smile on his face.

"Hello," Angie stammered. "You--look happy."

"I am!" Lawton told her, falling into step.

Angie wondered if she could be personal enough to ask why. He didn't wait for her to ask. As they crossed the street, he said, "Grand news this morning! I've been transferred to the Los Angeles office!"

Angie stopped still. Nothing of her wanted to move. Heat of the pavement did not matter. Her feet froze. All of her froze. "You're going away?" she whispered.

"Yes," he said. "Yes! I've wanted to get to the coast for years, and this is the way to go--with a promotion and a raise, a new chance and a good one!"

Angie tried to smile, but it didn't work. "You aren't coming back from the coast, ever?"

"Not if I can help it," he said.

"No?" Angie asked, very softly. "Haven't you your friends here?"

Lawton shrugged his shoulders. "No one I can't do without," he said.

Elevators in Angie's stomach stood still in mid-passage. "No one?" she asked. Lawton lit a cigarette. "No one important," he said, looking at his wristwatch.

"You'll be away--forever? Angie asked, barely hearing herself. Lawton laughed, winding his watch. "A long time," he said. Angie tried to look at him. "Forever is a long time," she murmured.

Lawton readjusted his watch. "Forever is a long time," he repeated after her. "It sounds like the title of a bad movie. At any rate, I'll have to be moving along now. I've an appointment immediately after lunch. Goodbye, Angie."

Angie nodded. It was only when Lawton was halfway up the street, that Angie found power to move. She ran after him, caught him with a breathless "Wait a minute!"

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Forgot to tell you something."

"What?"

"I was in a restaurant. It was a while ago. A woman walked in, sat at my table."

"So?"

"You know her."

"Who?"

"The woman. The one in the restaurant."

"Who is she?"

"The one in your wallet. Sandy."

Lawton's grin was the widest Angie had ever seen on him, or anybody. It was huge, and to Angie, staring, transfixed, it wasn't on Lawton any more, and it wasn't Lawton in front of her, but a stranger, a handsome, dark man with dark eyes and white teeth soaking in sunlight, and a faraway look in the eyes, as if the travelling were over and the coast reached, viewed and approved, and Sandy were beside him. It was a stranger, and it wasn't Lawton, and if ever a rowboat had been in their lives, it was gone now, axed into a thousand slivers, all of them drowning, like the sun, like the poem, like everything, like the whole world, drowning in a river of ice.

"Tell me about it," the blur that used to be Lawton demanded. "Tell me about Sandy. What did she say? You're certain it was Sandy?"

"Certain."

"What did she say?"

The voice was low, and the blur, as if to swallow every word, grew mammoth. "She said she was sorry she wasn't home when you phoned, and that she would try to get in touch with you."

The smile on the blur exploded into teeth, more teeth than a face should have, and Angie's eyes welld up, and her chin would have quivered if she would allow it, but she didn't allow it. This time, though, Angie didn't turn away. She looked straight at the blur, with the nakedness of crying, but the blur didn't see. The voice came booming, "Angie--this has been a wonderful morning. You're too young to

understand, but I assure you it's as if my ship came in. Now, I really have to hurry. So long,kid, and thanks for the message."

The blur walked away. Angie never did understand how she managed to get home, walking amid blurs, zooming elevators, ice floes--and with her feet stabbed by splinters from a once-upon-a-time boat.

25.

It was morning, and Angie's room was cold, but there was no reason for it. It was warm outside, because people in the streets were carrying topcoats on their arms. Maybe it was Angie who was cold.

Tony's phonograph record lay on the living room table. Angie wondered when Tony would come for it. It was almost a week since the Juke Box incident. Tony never stayed away more than a day.

No practicing today. Nor yesterday. Nothing since Monday, and today was only--Tuesday! Then it was only two days since she had seen him! Not almost a week. Only two days. It was yesterday that she had seen Lawton, and that was when time had taken a flying ski-jump. Silly expression--ski-jump! No snow on the ground. It was not even autumn, officially, and certainly not winter, and there would be no snow until winter, so no ski-jump. But time had gone beserk.

Ski-jumps. Ice floes. Rivers of ice. Blurs. In Xanadu what did Kubla Khan do? All day? Why? What a bout the damsel with the dulcimer? Why did she remain in the vision? Why didn't she come visit with Angie?

Who wanted a damsel with a dulcimer? Who wanted such a creature! A dulcimer-quartet? Were there such things? She would ask Tony.

"Sophocles long ago
Heard it on the Agean..."

What had he heard? Silly. The answer was in the poem. So what. Besides, it was long ago. Sophocles was long ago, and now was now, and yesterday had a man named Lawton who was now a blur because right in front of her eyes he had exploded into a blur.

She had stood there in front of him, and she had cried, not turning away, and he had stood there, not seeing her. What about the arms and the comforting murmurs, and the smell of his shirt against her cheek? That was long ago, and no more. That was the island and the island was never again. Crying had meant something then. It had meant hush don't cry, and it had even meant a kiss on the cheek. But that was long ago and no more, and it didn't matter, because it was a blur, and blurs must never matter.

Tony would come tonight. He always came visiting on Tuesday nights, whether he was wanted or not. Angie wanted him tonight. She wanted him because he was gentle, kind and warm, and he had a shoulder, and it would be wonderful and comforting to cry on it. Maybe, if he wanted to, he could tell her about how he felt about her, the way he had tried to do in Max's when the Juke Box broke down.

Why wasn't it nighttime now? Only morning, so very early morning, so early that the mailman hadn't arrived. A whole day to live through, hours and hours and hours. No shoulder until tonight. No shoulder until tonight and Tony. He would come tonight. He always, always came visiting on Tuesday nights. No doubt about it. Only a matter of clenching fists and holding back tears until tonight and the shoulder came visiting.

Angie looked out of the window and saw the mailman moving on into the next house. She ran downstairs and returned with a grey envelope, addressed to her. It was written in Tony's backhand:

"Dear Angie,

I wrote this poem last night. It needs polishing, but I doubt if I'll have the opportunity or the inclination

to apply sandpaper.
There's too much sandpaper
in my life as it is."

Underneath was the poem:

"Perspective"

by Anthony Collini, Jr.

If the skies quake with danger,
We listen and hear little.
Do we care tonight
If morning's sun explodes
Or if midnight's moon
Wheels off its track,
Shaking havoc
On midnight's world?

If the skies smile with beauty,
We look and see little.
Do we think tonight
Of the moon as a man,
Broad of smile?
Do we wink at the stars,
Tuck our secrets
Behind the clouds?

Tonight the moon is
No globe of wonder,
Tonight the sky
Has no special meaning,
Tonight we stand together,
Whispering goodbye
To the soft, low, groan
Of the moonlight."

Angie turned the page. There was more to the note:

"Angie, I don't know how to tell you this. I'm not ashamed to say it hurts. Perhaps I'm too impossibly sensitive for this damned world, but I can't go on letting you silence me every time I try to tell you I love you.

It's time I did something about it. The only thing I can think of to do is to say goodbye to you. Not goodbye for a week, Angie dear, but a permanent one. Now, as always, I wish you the very best of everything. I love you, and always will."

She sprawled out on the couch, her head propped on her elbow. The elbow rubbed unpleasantly into the worn upholstery, so she put a pillow

under it. She tried to forget the note, yesterday, everything, but very insistently, the thought of the note and the poem returned and refused to go away.

She held the letter and the envelope in her hand. She found herself crying.

There was the memory of Mr. Lawton, Lawton the beautiful blur, but that was no use. The message was delivered. It was Sandy and Mr. Lawton now, never again Al, never again Al and Angie, not that it ever was. No more rowboats. Never.

There was Mamma, but Mamma would always love her anyway, and that was that.

There was Jonah, but Jonah was Tony's friend, and if Tony said goodbye, Jonah would probably stay away too, but he didn't matter much anyway.

There were no important girl friends. Sure, a few of the girls at school had exchanged addresses with her on graduation day, but they were all superficial.

Music School friends? Fine, but nobody who was close.

There was the piano, but the piano wasn't a friend. The piano was a headache and a challenge, and when the mood was wrong,music was almost an enemy.

Angie looked at the clutched envelope again. Under the flap, she saw suddenly, Tony had written something:

"P.S. Please remember--if you ever need me for anything, call me."

Angie giggled because it was like being saved from execution. Then,

for a minute, it was as if she hadn't found the post script. The fear of no more Tony came back, and she shivered with it for a while.

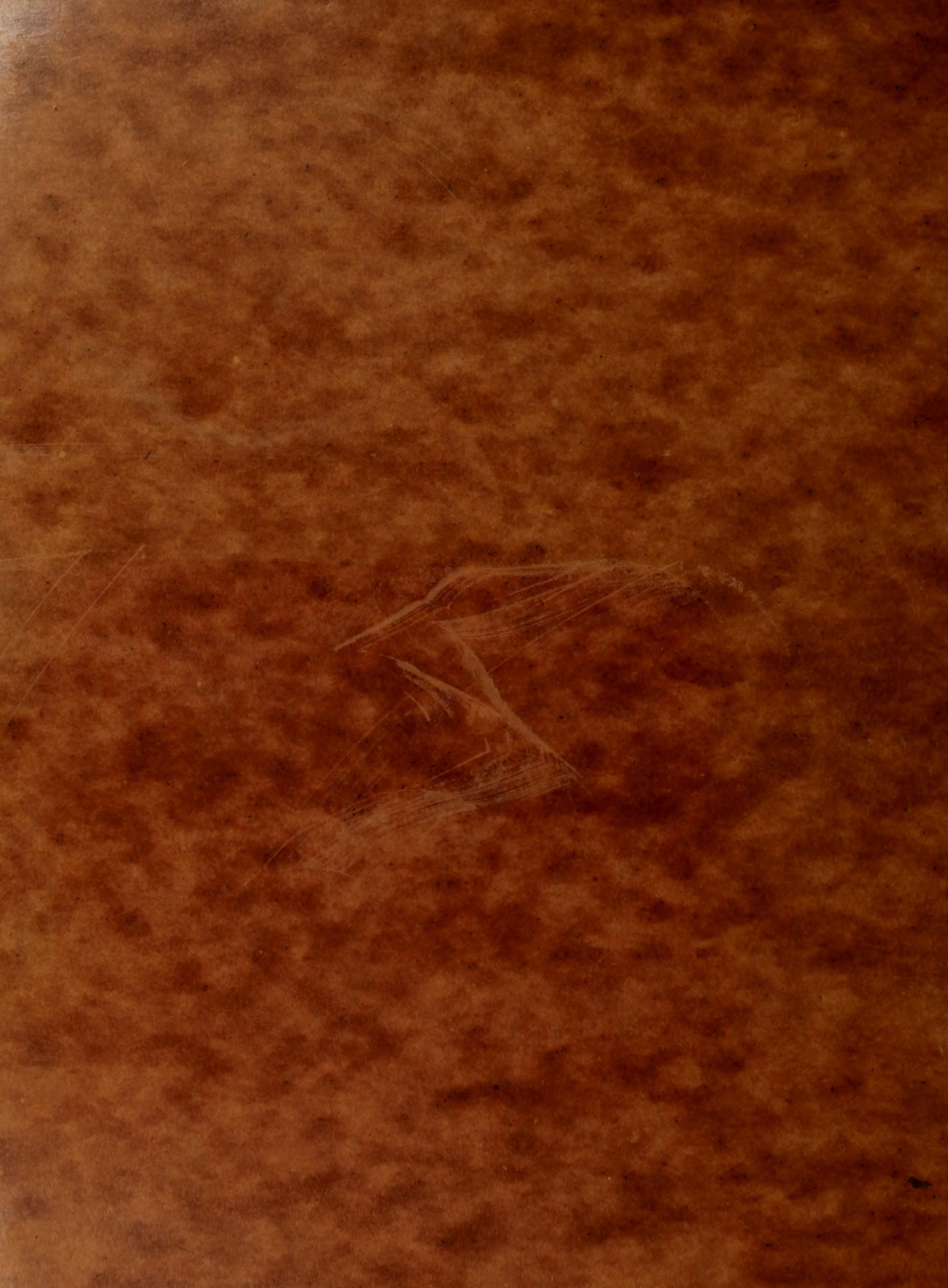
Tony, serious, sober-faced Tony who was always around whether he was wanted or not--he was a friend, someone to talk to, and walk with, and turn to, and there was nobody else, and if he meant a real goodbye, if he meant the poem literally, there would be no one to talk to anymore, and there was nothing in her life except worrying about the scholarship, and no Mr. Lawton because Mr. Lawton wasn't really there in the first place, and Mamma was her friend for life anyway, so that was nothing new, even if it was wonderful, and Jonah didn't really matter so much, one way or the other, even if he did know what blues music meant in a way that maybe Tony would not understand for a while, and there were no girl friends who were close enough to sit and talk to for hours, and all the neighborhood young people not counting Tony and Jonah thought she was a tomboy still, and autumn was coming--it was in the air already and the smell in her nostrils rode through her head into her fingers, and that meant the piano, but even music itself, wonderful, gloryful, magical music was an enemy when there wasn't anyone to talk to, because things were different now, not the way they had been when summer had begun, and why they were different, she didn't know, but they were--and a note and a poem from Tony meant something, weren't something to merely laugh at and put away half-unread in a bottom drawer, and the wind was blowing, almost whistling outside, and it didn't matter if nobody else knew that autumn was coming, because she did, and Tony would know, and they would talk about it tonight, when she called him, because she would call him, because if there was no Tony to share autumn with, or the music, or the cries on shoulders, or the dreams and

even the nightmares and the crazy wispy ideas, and even the room, the old, battered, work-filled room, then nothing was good, and nothing was the same any more.

She cried some more, and fell asleep. When she woke up, perhaps a half-hour later, she discovered that her monthly flow had begun, and her head ached. Outside was an early darkness. Leaves in the trees rustled wildly.

She wondered if it was going to rain. A little while later, when the first few drops fell, she thought of rain as being the lovemaking between the sky and the earth. She fell asleep again, and there were no dreams.

The End.

BOSTON UNIVERSITY
1 1719 02544 4045

REDI COVER
USE "WJ" FASTENERS
FOR BINDING SHEETS
TO DUPLICATE REFER TO NUMBER
A Product of Wilson Jones Co., U. S. A.